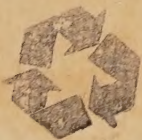


10
1909

To
President Garvey, M.D.,
with best wishes from
W. J. J. Cornelius
101 St. N. Peckham,
London, England
Jan. 1926.



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BLAISE PASCAL

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A STUDY IN RELIGIOUS
PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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WILLIAMS AND NORGATE

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

1909

PREFACE

THERE should be scarcely any occasion to write a preface to a book of this sort ; the thing is written and must stand or fall on its own merits without any apology or explanation from the author. And yet it will be seen that without further ado, and in face of the foregoing statement, I set about explaining.

Though I still disclaim the wish to excuse the book, or to set down the reasons that induced me to write it, there is a statement about its form which I desire to make, and which cannot find itself embodied in the text.

I wished to write of what, in my opinion, was the attitude of Pascal towards religion, and to show how this standpoint was come to only after many difficulties. I did not see how that object might be accomplished without a description of his life and of his acts. So that a large portion of this book is become a biography, and is designed to

show the nature of the education and of the youth of him about whom it is written. The suggestion that he was of a certain character and habit could not be made until the man had been pictured, and his disposition in the last period of his life could not be shown until the years of which it was the product had also been spoken of, so that the endeavour had to be made to set forth, as truly as might be, the happenings of his career. For I do most firmly believe that Pascal—and with him any other man you please—was to a great extent the sport of circumstance, and was turned from one road and set upon another by the chance of those events that he might meet with ; that he was not born into the world with a character that should guide him without regard to prosperity or sorrow ; and that had he found less time for reflection he had probably been the sooner forced to a decision.

H. R. J.

GREAT SHELFORD,
CAMBRIDGE.

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BLAISE PASCAL

CHAPTER I

How much of himself a man may owe to the character of his dead sires is a thing impossible to estimate. Yet it would seem that the debt is great, and that the lives of men long past and forgotten find some measure of second existence in the being of their descendants. A race born and matured in some lean district, where living is a hard affair and bodily comforts not readily come upon, will surely hand down remembrance of their struggle, and give to some distant offspring, nurtured among very different surroundings, the understanding of things which he has neither seen nor known, and therewith a fuller equipment for his part, whatever it may be, in life. The family of Pascal had grown old among the mountains of Auvergne, and though in the later generations the males of the line seem all possessed of the dignity

of the official and busied with the routine of administration, it is no exaggerated supposition to find in the person of Blaise Pascal the reflection of some ancestor engaged in more exacting business than the collection of taxes, one who had arrived at a great contempt for ease and handed down to his descendants a high sense of duty and much regard for truth.

Whatever might have been the chances of their earlier history, the family of Pascal had in its later days gained respect, position, and pecuniary ease. An Etienne Pascal, *maître des requêtes*, had received rank and honours from the hands of Louis XI. ; the grandfather of Blaise Pascal was a *trésorier de France*. Yet no ambition of title and riches seems to have found place in the plans of the Pascals ; no great schemes would appear to have absorbed them ; in a time of intrigue and of sudden rise they moved in the world of politics content with their immediate business, and unconcerned with other things. Men of a locality they were, proud of their achievement and interest ; conscious, no doubt, that they figured large in the official world of Clermont, but seeing little farther and quite unmindful of their narrow vision.

A family so respectable, so prosperous, that one cannot but imagine them a little dull. The men serious-minded and delighting in weighty discussions ; not too kindly, it might be, to the vices of their neighbours ; the women, placid, earnest, untalked of in a scandal-loving age, good mothers, true wives, but, to set against their virtues, lacking something of spirit and emotion.

In 1618 Etienne Pascal, president of the Cour des Aides at Clermont Ferrand, married Antoinette Begon, a woman, it seems, of great piety, but with little else to mark her. Etienne Pascal, having already showed ability in his calling, was in a fair way to maintain the high standing of the family. Of a scrupulous honesty, a broad intelligence, and a nature simple and quiet, he as well as any of the line from which he sprang, was so endowed as to go through life setting aside those things he did not understand, accepting the teaching of others, and all absorbed in his immediate business. Something of a scholar, at least not unacquainted with mathematics, he can easily be pictured in his daily life at Clermont, doing the King's business with a very scrupulous care, mindful of his position and his dignity, interest-

ing himself in the affairs of the town, and finding pleasure and recreation in sober discussion with men of his own standing.

Antoinette, his wife, is something harder to imagine, and beyond her piety and a certain personal attraction, would seem to have been a woman little capable of impressing her associates. In any case, having provided her husband with four children, she died, with her family still in infancy, and dying took small place in the records of her house.

In the second year of the marriage a son was born to the couple, who suffered the misfortune of seeing this first child die within a few hours of its birth. The following year Gilberte was born ; then, after three years, another son, Blaise, who should raise the family from that uneventful prosperity which had marked it, giving to the name much and just celebrity. In 1625, two years after the birth of Blaise, another girl, Jacqueline, was born to Etienne Pascal, and with these three living children the family was completed.

The household, one supposes, was typical of the well-ordered bourgeois dwelling of the time. The mother would carefully attend her children,

taking care that their bodies should receive such comfort as was fitting, and that, from their earliest years, they should be trained to regard the observances of religion as of the utmost importance. Whether Etienne Pascal took active part in the guidance of his family during their first years of life is a point which is unmentioned in the records of the house ; that he would in no wise interfere in the teaching of his wife seems a matter of which there should be no doubt. Although unaffected by that religious enthusiasm which marked the last stages of his life, it is impossible to think of him as other than a man readily accepting the religion put before him, not questioning its teaching, and taking simple pleasure in observing the rites of his faith.

There is one incident which should mark the agreement in which this couple dwelt in regard to all matters that passed the ordinary business of their lives ; and it should show that here, at any rate, the woman, whose only memorial is piety, was no more ready than her husband to accept a superstitious explanation, and that he, although a man of education and with some reputation for learning, was no less eager than

his wife to receive without question the solution offered.

The affair is recounted by Marguerite Perier, Blaise Pascal's niece, and described many years after the occurrence ; yet it is told with something of relish, as if reflecting credit on all parties, and not least on the child who should be so singularly distinguished from the common run. The recital bears the stamp of honest intention, and is without doubt the statement of events as they occurred, together with that solution which was adopted at the time.

It seems that when scarcely twelve months old Blaise Pascal fell ill of a strange malady, and one which caused his parents both perplexity and alarm. The features of the case were of a most marked originality. The child had fallen into a condition of languor from which little or nothing would move it ; the sight or close proximity of water caused the infant much uneasiness ; and, most disquieting symptom of all, the view of his parents leaning together over his cot threw the boy into a paroxysm of excitement, verging, it seems, on a fit. This state of things continuing, and the young Blaise refusing all nourishment,

the parents were not unnaturally much concerned to find the cause of so unusual an attack. The doctors then, as in after years, failed to diagnose his ill ; someone, either in a serious endeavour to aid the unhappy parents, or simply wishing to say something of a business which had the virtue of having puzzled the physicians, suggested that a spell had been cast upon the baby, and that the only chance of his survival was to find the offending sorceress. Whereupon Etienne Pascal, accepting the suggestion apparently without demur, sought about him for the culprit. It happened that a woman had asked charity from him and had been refused ; this woman had moreover the reputation of one who was acquainted with witchcraft. To the house, then, of Etienne Pascal she was brought ; questioned on the topic with, it seems, considerable directness ; confessed to the crime and implored forgiveness, promising to remove the spell. To bring about this result she had need of certain materials, amongst others the family cat ; this was given to her, and she, saying that the spell should at once be removed, departed. That night Blaise Pascal became worse, and shortly before midnight dropped into a state of

unconsciousness which his parents mistook for death. Etienne, furious at being duped in such fashion, rushed from the house to find the witch; encountered her upon the doorstep, and behaved to her in a very violent fashion, with a violence not only of the tongue. She, however, when his fury had something abated, explained that the spell had passed from the child, but that the uninfluenced spirit had not yet returned to it, and that to accomplish the required object, further incantations would be necessary. To this Etienne Pascal agreed and returned to the bedside of his son. The child now appeared living, and slowly regained consciousness. To the joy of the parents its dislike of water had passed, and before long it could without anger endure the sight of its father and mother standing together; and from that time, the record relates, the recovery continued without interference.

So runs this story of spells and black magic, and of the strange ill and yet stranger recovery of the young Pascal. No suggestion of improbability was set up against it, and Blaise Pascal was brought up to think that in his early years the operation of supernatural forces, and those not of

a benevolent kind, had played an important rôle in his existence.

Soon after the miraculous recovery of her son, before her influence could have any weight upon his life, that woman of great piety, Antoinette, wife of Etienne Pascal, died. That her children, and more especially her son, were to grow to maturity without maternal influence, must surely have affected their lives; but that a woman as colourless as she would seem to have been should have influenced to any large extent the achievements of her great son, or greatly lightened the burden of that mind groping in dark and misty places, is a thing not very likely. Blaise Pascal, though always in close sympathy with those about him, yet lived so much within himself, seeking his road alone, that there seems no suggestion in the record of his life that the presence of his mother would have made him other than he was.

In 1626 Etienne Pascal was left a widower, having care of three young children, the eldest six years and the youngest not more than twelve months old. With that patient and conscientious care that seem so strongly to have marked his life, he turned to the upbringing of his family, and

found in this new occupation something at once absorbing and congenial. His eldest daughter Gilberte, herself a person of some force of character, soon stepped into the way of domestic management ; and unless her writings much belie her, may be pictured, while still of tender years, doing much to help her father, and, even from the small beginnings, noting with loyal admiration the doings of her illustrious brother. Blaise was from the first something of a child apart, bearing the distinction of a spell cast and withdrawn ; the eyes of the family and of their nearest friends were set upon him, and doubtless in the circle of intimate acquaintance he would be spoken of as a child destined to do great things.

How much of that which Gilberte wrote about his early life was seen through the eyes of after years, magnifying trivial things by light of the mature achievement, it is, no doubt, impossible to find out. That many small things assumed too large an import, when she sat down to write a memoir of that dead brother whom she loved, and whose greatness was a thing beyond all hiding, is surely so ; but that Blaise Pascal did differ from other children, did show powers and discernment

beyond his years, no sane man, reading his life and having knowledge of his life's work, would be ready to deny.

From the age when he could speak, Gilberte would have us to suppose, he gave every sign of a mind beyond the common. His questions were unceasing—a thing, however, not unknown in children—and inquired always into the nature of the world about him—and here again, in spite of that sisterly enthusiasm which suggests this quality as some unusual trait, he would seem to have conformed to, rather than differed from, the nature of childhood. When Gilberte cries, “Ce commencement, qui donnait de belles espérances, ne se dementit jamais,” one cannot but feel that the “high hopes” were set on something of an insufficient basis. Whatever the quality of his childish questions, and however much they were like or went beyond those of his sisters, they yet carried sufficient importance to impress his father, so that besides the devotion which an only son must claim they brought him a closer attention, and the reputation of wisdom beyond his years.

So marked was this impression of Blaise Pascal's ability that his father felt himself compelled to

undertake in person the education of his son ; distrusting, it would seem, the teaching of the schools, and imagining that a false step in the conduct of so rare an intelligence might lead to great disaster. And this resolution Etienne Pascal faithfully carried out, so that, until he took the matter into his own keeping, Blaise was entirely under his father's guidance.

The better to ensure this purpose, Etienne Pascal resigned his appointment at Clermont and betook himself and his family to Paris, there to devote himself exclusively to the education of his children. It seems something unusual, and perhaps inclining to an excess of parental devotion, that a man should discontinue the practice of his profession, remove his dwelling, and set himself down in another city, for the only cause that his son, aged eight years, would find benefit from the change. To give up an occupation and sever the acquaintance of one's friends is no small thing ; and yet Gilberte Pascal would suggest that solely for the better upbringing of Blaise her father made this change. That there were other reasons as well one cannot doubt, and that the father, as the sister, saw only the son's advantage one does but hope.

Being settled in Paris, and being without definite occupation, Etienne Pascal concerned himself with the instruction of his son. In this matter he was not without particular ideas. To his seeming the way of learning should be made smooth and easy ; care should be taken that no insoluble problem appeared on the student's path ; the mind should be occupied, but only with those things which it might grasp with readiness and understanding ; the child should be taught to inquire into things around him, yet the inquiry should be strictly guided, so that the explanation might not lack. The idea is not unheard of at the present moment, and may find adherents in almost any modern school. One principle surmounts all others in such a system : the learner should always occupy himself with work that is within his easy comprehension, and that which will confuse or baffle him, seeming without clear form and causing him the utmost effort of the mind to shape it, should be strictly set aside. So it is said, and doubtless Etienne Pascal argued after the same fashion, the mind may develop quietly, gather slowly its full force, and in due time, plunging unrestrained into the maze of human wondering, find a new way

alone. If such a system were possible of execution, it should result in a very fine confusion of the early years of manhood, and, if strictly carried out, should lead the youth, newly released from the leading strings of his masters, to the blackest bewilderment and a deep despair of life. For through a period of many years, and those of first importance, to teach that all that comes within our vision may find a ready explanation, is a thing unjust and cruel. Yet, happily for the peace of mankind, such a system cannot be wholly carried out ; the mind of the most unintelligent of children will puzzle itself with things it cannot cope with, and will not seek elucidation of its elders, and so, in defiance of the strictest tutoring, prepare itself for after years. But the system of suppressing difficulties, if diligently persisted in, may yet cause much unhappiness to those who suffer it.

So Etienne Pascal, in a fine enthusiasm of fatherly affection, sought to make smooth the education of his son. Blaise was instructed in many things, the causes of the effects being always very easy to find. Languages he might not study until twelve years old ; mathematics he must not even hear of. The endeavour seems to have gone

astray almost from the outset ; the explanations offered were not always satisfying ; and the boy of twelve, though carefully fed, was already seeking other sustenance. "Car," says Gilberte, "il a toujours eu une netteté d'esprit admirable pour discerner le faux ; et on peut dire que toujours et en toutes choses la vérité a été le seul objet de son esprit, puisque jamais rien ne l'a pu satisfaire que sa connaissance."

This ability to discern that which was false or unsound in the explanation supplied, and which his sister so lightly describes as admirable, was a very persistent motive in his life. He would, it seems, even at the age of twelve, demand an answer, and if he found in that offered something wanting, would seek to settle the affair himself ; so that one day at dinner, hearing the ringing sound produced by the striking of a plate, he inquired the reason, and finding the given explanation insufficiently convincing, set himself to investigate the phenomena of sound. As the result of his inquiry, he produced a pamphlet on sounds, which, though we may reasonably suppose it something lacking in knowledge, was at the least well thought out. And yet he was forbidden certain

studies, and amongst them mathematics. Not improbably he was told, when seeking the reason of these restrictions, that the time was not yet come, and that in the future he would understand that which was to-day too difficult ; so that he would go about his childish business thinking that in some golden future all that was obscure would be made clear, and that with years would come a light of knowledge making truth an easy quarry. And to this delusion the endeavours of his father would point a straighter road.

There was another side to the system of Etienne Pascal, and there, for the teacher in any case, was the depository of those matters which passed his understanding. The Christian religion was to him the background of his living ; seemingly unassailable, most certainly unquestioned, it provided the explanation of mortality, and set up a high object for endeavour. He was of those fortunate men who never think to inquire into the faith which they profess. Religion for him set up a great barrier across existence, dividing the profane from the divine ; dwelling on the near side, he was content to see the wall and picture the smiling country that should lie beyond,

while for guidance and instruction he accepted the teaching of those who announced that they could see beyond the top. Since he had never doubted of the matter, he took for sufficient explanation of all that was disturbing in existence the assertion that there was some power governing man's destiny, and that some day after death each man should have sight of the country beyond the wall. His teachers led him farther to the believing in a personal God, and in Christ, the Fall, and the Redemption ; so that for a man who did not question, the whole matter was complete, and nothing disquieting was to be found about him, since that which seemed so would some day have other explanation.

In such fashion as this he saw that his son was instructed, never imagining that Blaise should ever do otherwise than rest quietly and untroubled in obedience to that Church, wherein his ancestors had lived and died. To see that the boy ate, not too greedily, of that knowledge which he might acquire in schools, was therefore his pressing business ; that the son might differ from the father, groping darkly where the parent never wandered, was a thing outside his calculations.

So Blaise Pascal was carefully tutored and faithfully instructed in the Christian creed.

When young Pascal was twelve years of age, it followed from the plans of his father that he should begin the study of languages. That he might devote himself the more exclusively to this pursuit, and that he might not have too much to occupy him at one time, all knowledge of mathematics was still strictly forbidden him. But it happened that Etienne Pascal, himself something of an amateur in mathematics, was in the habit of inviting to his house such of the prominent mathematicians of the day as were of his acquaintance. In such circumstances it is not to be wondered at that Blaise should have surprised something of their conversation. Finding that there were here discussed matters of which he had not heard, he asked his father to instruct him in this science, which request was promptly refused. By dint, however, of considerable importunity he induced a promise from his father that when he had attained some advancement in the study of Greek and Latin, he should be instructed in this subject. But the boy was not to be so easily repulsed and soon returned to the attack, though

from a different quarter. He would have a description of what in general this science of mathematics was. Etienne Pascal, seeing no great danger to his schemes in complying with the request, answered him, enjoining the child, with time-honoured futility, neither to speak nor think about the subject any more. And with this the incident was for the time closed.

One supposes that, for some months at the shortest, the family continued in the ordinary fashion. Blaise was taught daily by his father Latin, and a general round of knowledge that should prepare him for other things. In his hours of recreation the child was allowed to amuse himself at will; this at least seems evident. Whether at any time he played after the ordinary fashion of children there is no means of knowing. The thing would seem doubtful. It is, however, certain that he must have been a solitary, silent child, delighting more than is common in his own society; if not the circumstance had surely been remarked that after obtaining his general definition of mathematics he spent his hours of leisure alone, in a disused garret of the house. There is no record of how his life was spent at this time, of

what kind of child he was, whether merry, or gloomy and morose. Gilberte spoils all by her foretelling of the great man ; treasuring only those things that might show how soon the genius flamed within him. Of the human boy and of his amusements we must make the story up ourselves, and that from the meanest details. He spent his hours of recreation apart in a garret, that is all she finds to say. Yet the picture should have more interest, if we could fill it in. He was not, alone intelligent, placed in a dull family ; his father was a man of parts and devoted to his son's well-being. Gilberte should not have been too dull a playmate ; and Jacqueline, famed for her child's beauty, her wit and spirit, was already well known at the Court, and an acknowledged favourite of Richelieu, a child in years and mind, rejoicing in the games of children, loving her dolls and refusing to give them up. In the midst of such a family did Blaise Pascal take no proper part ? Did the garret and his wondering always claim him ; did he not sometimes forget to look beyond him, and sometimes, as other children, seize the present in his games ? If ever he did amuse himself in playing, it could not have been

too frequently, for the business that engaged him surely made a very large demand upon his time.

The restrictions to which his father put him suited ill the longings of the boy. His mind, that mind "*qui ne pouvait demeurer dans ces bornes,*" was wandering already in the ways of science. Mathematics seemed to him a finer recreation than any he had known; but since books and talk were denied him, the matter had to be settled by himself. So the disused chamber and his playtime. There, for long hours, a piece of burnt wood his only companion, and the bare floor his work-table, he set himself to explore this new and wondrous kingdom; and there in solitude and with no help or suggestion, he discovered for himself the foundations of geometry; called a circle a round, a line a bar, saw that to move at all some assumption must be made, and so assumed the axioms.

Relying only on himself, without books and without instruction, he chose the line that he would follow, sought the way and found it, and so went happy on the road.

Thus busying himself with his absorbing occupation, seated, one may suppose, upon the

floor, the burnt stick in his hand, he sought one day to prove that the exterior angle of a triangle is equal to the two interior and opposite angles. Upon this scene came Etienne Pascal ; and since the child was absorbed in his problem, his entrance was unnoticed. For some time he stood watching, strangely puzzled, one can be certain, that the boy should draw figures of geometry for his amusement, very far, in all likelihood, from imagining the truth. The moment when the worker's attention was drawn to the fact of his father's presence should be one for some great artist, some painter of skilful cunning, who should show the small boy seated on the floor, the burnt stick in his right hand, gazing over his shoulder, struck with surprise and fear ; to complete the canvas, the father leaning forward where he had been peering over his son's shoulder, wonder plain written in his expression, and something deeper, an awakening awe that here was a suggestion that he dare not think was true. Thus for a moment they kept silence, the boy through fear at being found at his forbidden pastime, the father timid to put this strange discovery to the test. Etienne Pascal was the first to speak, and

in a voice altered, it is likely, with emotion, asked what his son's occupation might mean. Blaise, with that simplicity that was his, replied that he sought the proof of the external angle of a triangle equalling the two internal and opposite angles, and not improbably plied the burnt stick to show how the demonstration should be carried out. But the father, speaking with the curtness of a man in great anxiety, would know why he thought about this thing and what had led him to consider it. Led on by the questions of the man, the child exposed his treasure, went back to the beginning, showed how he had questioned, and found answers that seemed to him true and just, and how at the moment he continued his reasoning, seeking whither it would lead. To this Etienne Pascal listened in silence, and when the recital was finished hurriedly quitted the room without further speech. To Blaise the moment must have been disquieting, for he had surely never seen his father so strangely moved; he would have reckoned the enormity of his offence, gaining perhaps comfort from the thought that no parental anger could rob him of the thing which he had found. Etienne Pascal, thinking nothing of the

boy's anxiety, rushed from the house, seeking the advice and counsel of a close friend, a certain M. le Pailleur. There, in a state pardonably hysterical, he unfolded his tale. In violation of his injunctions, without aid from books or men, his son, Blaise, had reasoned for himself the first principles of geometry, had done that which surely no child of twelve, and few grown men had done before ; such was the burthen of his words. M. le Pailleur was firm in his opinion : to forbid the study of mathematics to a child so extraordinary would be the purest folly ; books should be given him, and the genius which had so surprisingly awakened should receive guidance and help.

So Blaise, waiting in the garret, found his father return not with the purpose of correcting disobedience, but with a full permission to study mathematics, and the promise of books and of assistance. A beginning of such a lively promise could not fail to point the boy as likely to gain great distinction ; and to have shown so marked a preference for one subject should have made clear the destiny of the most of his endeavours ; yet Etienne Pascal would not entirely withdraw

his system, and, though aiding and approving the child's study of mathematics, insisted that it should remain a matter for his hours of recreation.

That his study of languages suffered by reason of the attraction of his leisure hours is more than likely ; but the permission to occupy himself with mathematical investigation being granted, Pascal might turn his back upon the garret and the burnt stick, and seek other surroundings and more efficient implements to aid him in his work. And in this we may suppose that he did not hesitate. "Comme," so relates Gilberte, "il trouvait dans cette science la vérité qu'il avait si ardemment recherchée il en était si satisfait, qu'il y mettait son esprit tout entier."

And so for a while, and that perhaps the happiest period of his life, he found a subject into which he might cast the whole of his energies, feeling that each step he took was clearly shown, and that reason and truth were in reality his fast companions.

CHAPTER II

FROM the account that Gilberte gives of her brother's life at this period, it would seem that from the moment that Blaise Pascal gained his father's permission to study mathematics, he abandoned whatever remnants of childhood still clung to him. It is hard to fill the rôle of the man of science and at the same time take the ordinary pleasure of the child. It is difficult to suppose Pascal so extraordinarily endowed as to succeed in a part so exacting ; so that he would turn from discussion with his elders, which discussion he would conduct on terms of equality, and immediately forget himself in some imaginative game. The figure he most readily suggests is that of a child serious and thoughtful, clearly endowed with ability beyond the usual, and himself by no means unmindful of the position where he stood. Unless one would rob the boy of all

humanity, attribute to him qualities unnatural and in some degree distasteful, he must be seen content with his prowess and aware of the distinction that marked him off from other boys.

After his solitary investigations—and one cannot think him so dull-witted as to fancy these of slender merit—and when he received the aid of books and the guidance of men, he continued to attack his subject with the readiest ability. Before long he showed himself sufficiently instructed to listen to the discussion of experts with comprehension and delight. His father, by no means displeased, one imagines, at this circumstance, introduced him to those scientific gatherings which he himself frequented, and which were the beginnings of the Académie des Sciences. In such an environment Blaise Pascal soon showed himself well placed ; his age and the history of his initiation would, at first, have brought him attention, later his position would rest on merit and his equality with the other members would become a matter beyond dispute.

During these discussions, in face of men of whom the youngest might have been his father, listened to with admiration by those already of

proved ability, it is very far from possible that Pascal did not feel himself a man apart, born to add lustre to the tale of human effort, and to see and understand where other men were blind. Without much definite accomplishment to set against his reputation, yet spoken of and deferred to as displaying genius, he could scarcely do otherwise than gain a high idea of intellect, and make of human reasoning something that walked near to truth.

Meanwhile another member of the family was also making the name of Pascal frequently occur on men's lips, and that in a society at once more exalted and less exclusive than the embryonic Académie des Sciences. Jacqueline Pascal appears to have been at this time a child of extreme beauty, to which she added a precocity rare except in this remarkable family. In 1636, when not more than eleven years of age, she was part-author of a comedy in verse which, possessing certain merit, was said to hold out great promise for the child's future. Not long afterwards, on the occasion of the Queen's pregnancy, she made some more verses lauding an event of such happy importance to France. These verses were presented to the Queen herself, the young authoress at the same time making her

appearance at Court, where her beauty, as much perhaps as some impromptu epigrams with which she signalled her appearance, gained a ready popularity; the world delighting, then as now, in the discovery of a child prodigy, and being by no means displeased when, with an unusual ability, there should be also charm of person.

Soon after her successful entry at the Court, and about the time that Blaise was preparing his *Treatise on Conics*, Jacqueline was attacked with smallpox and left the sick-room very much disfigured. That she seemed unaffected by this change in her appearance, and that she enjoyed an undiminished popularity, are alike creditable to herself and to the society in which she moved.

Again Gilberte is silent on a point of pressing interest. One would gladly hear something of the making of these verses, and know whether the writer of the *Provinciales* felt a love of true expression already awake within him, and so brought advice and criticism to the helping of his sister's work. Jacqueline and Blaise were always in such close sympathy, that the thought of the boy holding apart, absorbed in his own business and quite unconcerned with the other's doings, is one not readily come upon.

Despite the distinction brought upon him by his children, things were not well at this time with Etienne Pascal. Some scandal of the Finance Office occurring, and a suspicion together with the Cardinal's displeasure, falling upon him, it was judged prudent by his friends that he should disappear until the trouble had calmed. Thinking the suggestion to show good sense, he acted upon it, though, as would be in a man so upright, with great reluctance at the thought of flight.

It happened, therefore, that after a period of unusual notoriety the family of Pascal found themselves without a head and fallen in official circles, and in the eyes of the great minister, into suspicion and disgrace. During this time Jacqueline was to appear in some theatricals at which Richelieu had promised to be present. The question that he should perhaps be reminded, by the sight of the daughter, of the existence and supposed offence of Etienne Pascal was seriously discussed by those who wished well of the family. After due consideration, and at the urgent instance of an influential patron of Jacqueline, it was decided that the interests of the father might be benefited rather than harmed by the performance

of Jacqueline ; and so, but not, one may suppose, without a certain misgiving, she played her part. The Cardinal expressed his satisfaction at the entertainment and was making inquiries as to who Jacqueline might be, when she, forestalling further information, went up to him and begged that, if he had been gratified at her acting, he would grant her a favour in return. He, so runs the story, pleased by the child's appearance and manners, and amused, it might be, at the fearless way in which she accosted him, took her on his knee and inquired what favour she might wish for. Upon this she informed him of the family's misfortune and of the unjust suspicion resting on her father, finishing her appeal by the demand that Richelieu should pardon and reinstate him. It is more than probable that the minister at once realised that the child's playing had been arranged with a hope of this result, for it is in the last degree unlikely that, had he any reason to suspect the conduct of Etienne Pascal, he would have been moved to pardon by reason of this dainty intercession ; it is, indeed, very possible that the too great zeal of his friends had caused the elder Pascal needless alarm and anxiety. However

that may be, the Cardinal made no demur about the pardon, granting it at once with one condition. Etienne Pascal, he said, should come back, should present himself at the Cardinal's hotel, and should be received with favour, but this favourable reception should rest on the circumstance that he should bring his children with him.

This, we are informed, he duly did, though, not thinking the invitation to be meant in earnest, presenting himself the first time without his family, and being on that score refused an audience. Returning with his children, he found the statesman inclined to graciousness, and received not only pardon but fresh appointments.

It is to this incident of the obtaining of Richelieu's favour and the appointment of Etienne Pascal to a charge at Rouen that the most important results in the life of his son Blaise may be attributed. That the condition of Rouen at this time and its effects upon the thoughts and position of the Pascals, that the influence of Jansenism, and that the confinement of provincial life made no change in Blaise Pascal's development, is a baseless and unjustified speculation. That he was so placed as to suffer these

influences, and that from such causes certain results might follow, is a thing solidly based, and may be justly used in an attempt to understand the man.

So to Rouen the family of Pascal moved, there to take up something of an official position, and to mix and sometimes be involved in the disputes which troubled the town.

That the government of Richelieu, though brilliant and far-reaching in its foreign policy, and successful in its endeavour to destroy the old feudal nobility, was yet something more than weak in its treatment of finance is a question of general history. Of money the Cardinal had most pressing need, and to tax the country beyond all power of bearing was the easiest and the shortest way to gain it. To see the country borne down beneath its load, to hear of peasants, driven frantic by exactions, rising against the tax collector, was no doubt displeasing to the statesman who wished the good of France ; yet to forego his dreams of expansion and own himself at fault in the matter of supplies was, to his seeming, a thing far worse. And so the taxation went on. Yet the collection was not easy, and the King lost much that he should gain, and the people were nowise the better for the loss.

Therefore Etienne Pascal, an honest man not likely to rob the King or to oppress the people beyond what was necessary, was sent with others into Normandy. And some time in the summer of 1639 found himself at Gisons, there to do the King's business as "Intendant de Justice." It is probable that his children did not follow him there, but remained in Paris until he settled in Rouen early in the following year.

At the time when the Pascals arrived in Rouen the city and the country round were in a state of the utmost disquiet. The revolt of the Nu-pieds was but recently put down. The city of Rouen itself had been the scene of an uprising in August 1639, in which a tax collector had been killed in the streets. The neighbourhood was scoured by marauding bands; a M. Gerbin, chevalier d'Éperon d'Or, gentilhomme de la chambre du roi de la Grande Bretagne, was killed in 1644 on the high road to Dieppe; the Sieur de la Rosière and his wife met the same fate; the abduction of young girls was a thing alarmingly recurrent. The most of these outrages were attributed to a band of gentlemen, whose headquarters was the Château Mesnil, to which many of the abducted

maidens were taken. When with great difficulty and the display of much force the château was taken and destroyed, the band broken up, and many of its members compelled to pay the price of their offences on the Place du Vieux Marché, the citizens of Rouen enjoyed something more of security.

Yet the means of averting such things were little better than the evils themselves. The complaints against the soldiery, whose business it was to see that the King's Peace ran, were continual and bitter. When, in December of 1639, troops under Gassion were to arrive in the city, the Archbishop, mindful of the safety of his flock, caused the announcement to be made known that the Convent of the Ursulines was open as a refuge for the maidens of the city until such time as the soldiers should be duly quartered and settled. It is stated that the inhabitants of the faubourgs hid themselves during the passing of the troops, so that the place appeared deserted. Efforts were made, but without substantial benefit to the citizens, to rid the town of this evil. An Edict of the Parlement of Rouen in the year 1643 forbids those soldiers who were quartered in the faubourgs from entering the city after dark, or at any time

in bands of more than two or three, or when carrying fire-arms.

The condition of the country around was still more unquiet. It was no uncommon sight to come upon whole villages abandoned and in ruins ; and the tale comes down to us of a certain Becquet, the most prosperous man of his hamlet, who was held three years in prison because the village, reduced to a population of three, was no longer able to pay its former tax.

In Rouen, besides the unsafe condition of the streets, matters were not well. The Parlement quarrelled with itself, and with the government at Paris, and with the Archbishop ; and he, François de Harlay, a mighty stickler for sacerdotalism, the rights of the Church, and of the Archbishops, tried to improve matters and met with no marked success. A man of parts and conscientiousness, it would seem, was this Archbishop, yet not greatly supplied with tact. So that, entering into a business with the best of intentions, he would succeed in setting everything awry, and leave the other parties in a high offence. One thing he could in no way stand, and that thing he very constantly encountered : it was that the laity

should presume to offer suggestions on matters relating to the Church. This the Parlement not infrequently essayed to do, and one can imagine them not altogether unmindful of the offence which their conduct caused the masterful prelate. Again, M. de Harlay had no love for the Jesuits, and himself set up a college at the archevêché to contradict their teaching ; but here once more he met with failure, and the college grew empty and then ceased to be.

So that even the Church in Rouen went not untroubled in these anxious times.

The people showed no love for the King's officers ; and more especially did they hate Claude de Paris, Etienne Pascal's superior. When, early in the year 1640, the family of Pascal took up their dwelling in the Rue des Murs St Ouen, the city was overawed by soldiers, Gassion ruled in the town, privileges were withdrawn, and executions became things of common occurrence. The hatred, moreover, born to Claude de Paris was sufficient to extend to his assistants ; so that Etienne Pascal, despite his best endeavours, could not find himself popular. The death of his patron Richelieu added further to his difficulties ; and

though after 1641 the condition of the city showed improvement, the position of the Pascals was yet far from comfortable.

Those who enjoyed intimacy with the occupants of the house in the Rue St Ouen would be persons of a certain independence and character, such as should take pleasure in discussion with the master and his son, or who, wishing to enjoy the society of Jacqueline, would not fear to be on terms of friendship with a man connected with the taxes. It does not in any way appear that such persons were uncommon in Rouen at the time, but rather that the circle of the Pascal family's acquaintance was wide and interesting.

The mathematicians of the city would naturally gather for discussion with a young man so justly famous as was Blaise. These meetings, which commonly took place at Etienne Pascal's house, lacked something of the distinction of the young Académie des Sciences, and it may be presumed that Blaise Pascal received, not more attention than was perhaps his due, but yet more deference than would have come to him in a society where great distinction was a more common thing. It is evident that in a short while he was held to have

assumed a place of authority, and had collected round him a following of enthusiastic friends.

Jacqueline, in the same way as her brother, soon gained that position which she had held in Paris, and set herself with some seriousness to the making of verse. In this pursuit she received assistance from a master of the art she wooed ; it was, indeed, owing to the advice of Corneille that she composed a prize poem which added something to her reputation. The marriageable youth of the city was, it seems, much attracted by the charm and ability of the girl, and had she been so minded, she had met with no difficulty in finding a husband of birth and position. This, however, was not her will ; and though untainted by that strong morbid piety which was to claim her later years, even, says Gilberte, something heedless in the matter of religion, she would have nothing to do with marriage, but was content with her verses and her child's amusements, from which, she being then fifteen years of age, the family were at great pains to divorce her.

Some idea of the life and position of the family is gained from the account of the marriage, more properly the signing of the marriage contract, of

Gilberte Pascal and Florin Perier. The bridegroom was a man of Etienne Pascal's profession, and from Clermont, the original home of the house. He would appear to have had many of the Pascal characteristics, an honest ability and a seriousness very marked ; but whatever his virtues or defects, he found favour with Gilberte and was duly married to her in the summer of 1641. The signing of the marriage contract, a business commonly of some circumstance and festivity, was brought about with the utmost quiet. The ceremony was gone through at the notary's, in the presence of the couple most concerned, the family, and, for witnesses, certain domestics. Yet Etienne Pascal was in a position to afford some show had he been so minded ; the dowry was 21,000 livres, a not inconsiderable sum. It is, moreover, highly improbable that any unpopularity which might be attached to his office would have caused him to forego a more elaborate ceremony. The explanation would seem to be that, even at this time, something of the marked puritanism of after years had already found acceptance among the principles of the family, and that the festivity of the occasion was thought by them to be unprofitable.

It cannot be denied that whatever the merits of this household, they inclined to take life at the most serious valuation. One cannot imagine them, except perhaps Jacqueline, receiving much pleasure from the ordinary amusements of men. They would delight in discussion of problems of scientific importance, relieved by condemnation of the evils of the day and of the deplorable state of the city.

Blaise Pascal would in nowise differ from the others. In other things than mathematics he would take a sober view ; he appeared as a strong champion of the King's authority in face of the claims of the Parlement of Rouen, and no doubt supported the Archbishop in his struggles with the civil authorities. To a man so placed as he was little else was possible. Youth he had never properly met with, and childhood had been for him the briefest period disturbed by thoughts not commonly in children. His health had never been hardy, and grew worse as he grew older ; the joy of physical action would seem to have passed him by ; and the companionship of others of his own age was for him a thing but little known. His way had led him to associate with

his elders, with whom he discussed technical things on the footing of a peer. It is not possible that these conversations should have halted at mathematics and never gone beyond. And in matters relating to life and the relations of men and women, and their doings, he was without experience, and therefore lacking a full sympathy. He would hear things spoken of as evil, and himself would name them such; and with the seriousness of youth would exaggerate their importance, and come to have a horror of them and a great distrust for all who had been guilty of their commission. And going farther on his way and seeing more of men, and how very few of them were not unspoiled by some of these acts that he dubbed wrong, he would come to the conclusion that their way was altogether false, and that to escape these things he must choose some other road. So absorbed in his work and a sober, studious life, avoiding all temptation, he would think himself upon the path to virtue; not seeing in joy and laughter, and a clean, hard fight, half that is good in living, nor that because many things are done that should be undone, the doer is not hopelessly dishonoured on that account.

Gilberte married and gone to Clermont, the life in the house of the Rue des Murs St Ouen went on much as before. With the settling down of the family Blaise Pascal made his position more assured, worked on his problems and gained fame and admiration, and came to take something of a part in the affairs of the city. Yet, outside his work, one can be certain that he showed no great originality, and might have been seen by others as a man pre-eminently thoughtful, but albeit inclining to a mournful view.

CHAPTER III

IN 1641, about the time of Gilberte's marriage, Blaise Pascal began to find himself seriously affected in health, but since he had never led a life of great activity, and since his sufferings would seem to have been rather chronic than acute, he would appear to have taken no serious notice of the circumstance, continuing to work with his accustomed energy. The following year, being only nineteen years of age, he invented the arithmetic machine, to aid, it is said, his father in the settling of his accounts. During the next two years he was constantly engaged in an endeavour to produce a serviceable instrument that might have practical value to men of business, in which endeavour he was not successful, though the instrument was used in the year 1644.

This work would seem to have been peculiarly irksome to him, since it mainly consisted in the

attempt to make workmen carry out his instructions. When the work was completed his health had grown alarmingly worse, so that at the age of twenty-one he had definitely become an invalid.

With so heavy a handicap it would have been but natural that his work should have diminished in quantity, but no such tendency is apparent. If a man, continually in ill-health and sometimes in the acutest suffering, force himself to prolonged effort and rigorously turn his back upon the lighter amusements, it is very nearly impossible that he shall obtain any great idea of the material joys of men. The only joys that he will likely come upon are those of the mind ; and if the work be too exacting and the labour too incessant, he will have much ado to avoid falling into the habit of contemplating his own employment to the exclusion of all other things. And being so placed, he will see his horizon much limited, and find in application and hard work that alone which he can admire. If he be religious, nurtured in some faith which he has not questioned and in which he finds no flaw, the contemplation of immortal life and the surest means of enjoying it will become to him not only a thing of comfort, but a

matter of such stupendous import as to obscure and render trivial the affairs of daily life. Absorbed in a vision of the post-mortal, he will come to forget the mortal, or only regard it as a period in which man must carry out his duty, and then, as soon as the gods allow, thankfully pass on to his reward. Finding it difficult to come upon joy in this life, he is not unwilling to decry it as of little worth, proclaiming that the only true happiness is in a life hereafter. So that, seeing others intent upon enjoyment, appearing to find it, yet not unmindful of their duty and the just management of their affairs, he is inclined to call such living folly, and maintain that in their amusement they waste time which should belong to sterner things.

Such then, it is possible, was Pascal at this period, and in some degree through all his life. The joys that others vaunted he knew nothing of ; the quick blood pulsing in the veins, fatigue after bodily exertion, the long hard day in which difficulties have been met and overcome in the pursuit of some quite minor object, these were the things which, perhaps, he never knew. The influence of sounds and senses, æsthetic and

ephemeral, yet bringing comfort and a great uplifting to the mind, this, not improbably, he cast aside but half seen, calling it profane. So content, but with slenderest equipment, he went upon his way, seeing in his mathematics the absorbing duty of a lifetime, and in a life to come the hope of happiness not yet to be enjoyed.

In 1638, some two years before the arrival of the Pascal family in Rouen, there died Cornelius Jansen, bishop of Ypres, a man little known and with no great following. In 1640, the year that Etienne Pascal set up house in Rouen, a work of Jansen's entitled *Augustinus* was for the first time given to the world. On this work, and the teaching derived therefrom, was founded the sect of the Jansenists. The claim of the book was that it set forth the true teaching of Augustin, at that time most impurely taught throughout the Church. It somewhat restricted the idea of freewill, emphasised the doctrine of the fall of man and of the impossibility of his attaining perfection without the aid of God, and enjoined a simpler and more ascetic life on all true Christians. The sect steadily gained ground in France, and must, from the year 1644, have been the subject of conversations in Rouen

in those circles where theological matters were discussed.

In January of 1646, when Blaise Pascal was already occupied with his confirmation of the experiments of Torricelli, the weather set in hard. One morning, the frost being keen and the streets slippery, news came to Etienne Pascal that two gentlemen were about to fight a duel; he, not wishing that they should suffer through the current edicts, set out to stop the encounter, if he might. But before arriving at the scene of the meeting, he slipped upon the cobbles and broke his thigh. Being conveyed back to his dwelling—and we must suppose that the two gentlemen fought their duel unmolested—he begged the attendance of two friends, MM. de la Bouteillerie and Deslandes, both somewhat acquainted with the art of medicine. These gentlemen, seeing that they alone possessed his confidence, set about his cure, and to that end took up their abode for some three months in the Rue des Murs St Ouen.

It so happened that these men were followers of the Jansenist sect and much impressed with its teaching, so that, in addition to the bodily cure

which they attempted, they also set about a spiritual conversion. And for this purpose they not only held long discussions with their patient, but also provided him with writings in support of their views ; and being the better pleased if their arguments might convert three persons instead of one, they extended their teaching to the other members of the family—to Blaise Pascal and to Jacqueline.

The most ardent missionary could scarcely have awaited a more gratifying result. The whole family became enthusiastic of the new teaching, and professed a zeal of which their conduct was the most complete proof. Etienne Pascal, hitherto a man without any pronounced fondness for religious observance, was transported to the utmost enthusiasm, and in Jacqueline the change was marked beyond all doubt ; her popularity and social enjoyments seemed clean gone from her mind, and henceforward the religious life appealed to her without a rival. In Blaise Pascal the adoption of this new teaching, and a devotion to the ascetic life, was a thing less to be wondered at. The man had always been religious with the most unshaken faith ; his life had been solitary and apart,

and the theory that a man should shun all human joys, and live his life solely in contemplation, and in preparation for an existence after death, was in no wise unfamiliar. The moment of this devotional outburst was well chosen. His age, the state of his health, and the previous circumstances of his life would help him to a readier abandonment. The emotional side of his nature would be easily touched ; the idea of foregoing other occupation, of entire devotion to the spiritual life would come to youth with more acceptance than to maturer years.

And, moreover, Pascal was not a man ever content with any compromise, so that, being convinced of immortality, and of the probationary period which was man's life, he wished to give himself entirely to the preparation for his heaven, not thinking that it could be effected in other ways than with prayer and mortification. So strong was this idea in him, that even the pursuit of mathematics seemed but a feeble thing beside it ; and for this ideal alone the man was resolute to spend his days.

Yet the new position was taken up so quickly, the former work abandoned and the new life seized

upon with so much of suddenness and so little of his accustomed inquiry into reasons, that even without the evidence of later years, it may be judged an affair of passing emotion, with no basis on which to stand the rub of time. Ill-health and physical disability had helped him, so that the standpoint, when taken up, had seemed to show him no longer at a disadvantage, but rather superior to his fellows.

An incident that follows this adoption of the Jansenist teaching, and which took place in February of 1647, shows with much clearness the spirit of the change to which Pascal had given himself. The accounts of the affair differ in no small degree in their presentation of the matter ; that given by Gilberte making every effort to place the action of her brother in the most favourable light ; while, on the other hand, the accounts in the two MSS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale give rather a picture of youthful bigotry and intolerance. Since Pascal and his friends were moved to take any action in the matter, it seems near to impossible that the motive urging them could have been other than the desire to punish an attitude with which they did not agree. That the whole

conduct of Pascal in this affair is contrary to the spirit in which he wrote the *Pensées*, and to the attitude of his later life, the incident itself most plainly shows.

A capuchin, Jacques Forton, Frère St Ange, reputed something of a philosopher, came to Rouen early in the year 1647, and there began explaining the views which he held, though, it seems, with the utmost privacy and in no proselytising spirit. These views appear to have been unorthodox, and dealt with the nature of the birth of Christ. Pascal and his friends, hearing of this man and his ideas, paid a visit to him and inquired into his teaching. This he explained to them with considerable readiness, making no hesitation about the matter, but talking, one supposes, as to others interested in the nature of the discussion.

In the first week of February, St Ange delivered two lectures at Rouen to a small number of persons, propounding and elaborating his case. On the subject of these two lectures, with which they were the better acquainted since the matter had already been given them in private conversation, Pascal and his friends drew up a formal indictment of heresy against the capuchin, which indictment

they immediately laid before the authorities. Gilberte Perier insists that St Ange was warned by her brother that unless he withdrew his propositions this charge would be laid against him ; the two MSS. make no mention of this warning. In any case, the matter was brought forward and the authorities were urgently pressed to take the necessary steps.

M. de Bellay, who carried on the functions of the Archbishop during his absence from the city, was for letting the matter drop. Pascal and his friends were, however, firm ; such a danger to the Christian community could not pass unnoticed ; the young men of the city,—and here rings a note very like to youthful self-satisfaction and bigotry—not being sufficiently discerning to distinguish the false from the true, might be led into schism by the specious presentation of this new heresy ; the attention of all faithful churchmen should be directed to its suppression. So de Bellay reluctantly pursued the matter. St Ange was questioned, warned, and directed to sign a declaration in which he should proclaim himself untainted by the principles imputed to him. This he accordingly did. But the zeal of Pascal and

the most of his supporters was in no way appeased. The declaration, said they, was worthless, since a general denial of heresy, which was the purport of the document, was entirely unsatisfying to the needs of the case. De Bellay, who had written to the Archbishop that the matter was happily arranged, was, not unnaturally, annoyed at this persistence and inclined to refuse further action on the Church's part. Perhaps foreseeing this attitude of reluctance, Pascal and his friends immediately journeyed to Gaillon to lay the matter directly before the notice of M. de Harlay. He, hearing their statement that the signed declaration was worthless, entered into the matter with a spirit that must have been entirely gratifying to the young zealots. It is possible that the Archbishop was not the better pleased that his assistant had thought to settle the matter without due reference to his superior ; in any case, he sent word to de Bellay that the affair should be inquired into afresh and that a satisfactory refutation should be extracted from St Ange. For the purpose he was brought before the ecclesiastical council, was questioned on all the points of his teaching, and compelled to sign a statement formally denying those which

were not of approved orthodoxy. At this Pascal and his friends appeared satisfied, and the matter was let drop.

The business does not add much to Pascal's credit ; whether or not he had the good taste to warn St Ange of the impending action makes but little difference to the aspect of the affair. He had obtained his first information by means that should decently have rendered him inactive in any ensuing prosecution ; he could not offer other excuse for his action than that St Ange's opinions might, in certain circumstances, have led to something approaching a heresy. It would have borne a far better appearance if the ecclesiastical authorities had not been importuned in the business, but left to take what steps they might judge fitting. Pascal and his friends had surely found some more worthy occupation than a prosecution so unnecessary.

It at least seems evident that all those who first concerned themselves in the matter were not so uncompromisingly intolerant as Pascal himself. One Cornier, a doctor in theology, made some effort to stay the completion of the business ; left Rouen that he might not further be brought

into the prosecution, and wrote strongly urging Pascal to a lenient course. Yet this advice Pascal could not bring himself to act upon; heresy he had set out to punish, and was determined to encompass the result, since for the moment he saw it a finer thing to go blindly to his conclusion, than to halt, inquiring if the thing were right. In this whole affair there is so much hot-headedness, so much that recalls the unintelligent religious bigot, that Pascal, the philosopher, the man who thought truth and just dealing more important than all other things, is very far to seek.

The ordinary behaviour in Etienne Pascal's house must have been something rigid and uncompromising, and the recreations of the daily life reduced within the strictest limits. However much Blaise Pascal would seem to have been prepared for this invasion of Puritanism, the actual alteration in the family life was an event that came about with considerable abruptness. Jacqueline was confirmed at the end of the year 1646, and from that time forward became pressing anxious to enter some religious house. Not to be outdone in piety by her brother, she laid aside her verse-making, and appears to have

affected a solitary existence in preparation for her vows. Gilberte Perier and her husband, on the occasions of their visits to Rouen, seem to have fallen in with the views of the family, and shared in that austerity and religious exaltation which was the distinction of the household.

The attitude of Etienne Pascal is hard to understand. He had none of the enthusiasm of youth, and should by his life and character have been a man who had framed a code of existence and would abide by it ; yet at the instance of two friends, coming upon what he had already heard of the Jansenist teaching, he allowed himself to be persuaded to what seems a complete alteration of his way of living.

From what Gilberte Perier says in her Memoir on the life of her brother, it is to be presumed that the influence of Blaise Pascal himself must have been very considerable in producing this fervour of devotional ecstasy. His position in the household was strongly influential ; he was freely accorded the title of genius, and was looked upon as one whose knowledge and insight surpassed that of other men. So that when he favoured the new attitude, the father and sisters

would be brought to think admiringly of the matter ; and when he showed himself enthusiastic in the cause, praising, as he most assuredly did, its wisdom and merit, they would easily be guided by his convictions, and follow where he led.

He did not entirely lay aside his mathematical experiments, but continued his researches on the vacuum, which were finally accomplished by Florin Perier, working under his direction, on the Puy de Dôme in 1648. But the new standard by which he judged these things, and the mournful view which he now received of man and his endeavours, must have gone far to increasing his physical sufferings. It had become part of his accepted creed that no mundane satisfaction should find place in his life, and that his days must be spent wholly in preparation for death and the life beyond. As a means of more perfectly attaining the object that he desired, he would deny himself all leisure and amusement, dividing his day between religious exercises and the work which he had set himself. It is not hard to conceive that he soon fell into a state extremely morbid, and that in this condition whatever ill he suffered from was likely to increase. Following his usual habit,

he would disregard the increasing signs of ill-health, and apply himself with greater closeness to his self-imposed labours.

Sometime towards the middle of the year 1647 his condition became so much the worse that even his persistent acceptance of all suffering as but the common load of man was daunted, and he was compelled to seek some remedy for his ailment. The attack seemed of a more serious nature than any that he had suffered previously ; his symptoms became more pronounced, and in a short while he was struck with a paralysis of the lower limbs. In this condition he was sternly forbidden any of his usual occupations, and advised, if he had any regard for his future health, to seek some recreation and diversion.

It is useless, and of the idlest speculation, to attempt to supply the thoughts with which Pascal met this new crisis in his life ; yet it may justly be imagined that, whatever the strength of his religion, however great the contempt in which he assured himself he held man's life, there would come to him something of disquieting speculation, and the birth of doubt that, after such high endeavour, he might be mistaken in the road. For a man, struck

down by an illness that prostrates him and checked upon the full flood of his efforts, will often find himself no longer so firmly convinced of his most cherished ideals as in the days of activity and health. Enforced idleness will set his thoughts inquiring about that which used to busy him, and seeing from the spectator's standpoint he may well, affected by the new view that he has, find his admiration shaken for the ideal which formerly engrossed him ; and so, although he may regain his activity, and again engage himself in the pursuit of the same object, he will not uncommonly be conscious of a diminished enthusiasm, and seek in vain his old content.

CHAPTER IV

HAVING recovered from his paralysis, and being, though still in a condition of extremely bad health, yet able to move about, Pascal was advised by the doctors who attended him to visit Paris, where not only would he find greater medical skill, but where he would be likely to find more chance of amusement. It was impossible that Etienne Pascal should abandon his employment at Rouen; Gilberte had her duty at her husband's side; so that Jacqueline alone accompanied her brother to the capital.

It would seem that these two were now in perfect agreement upon the matter of religious observance, and that the enthusiasm of Pascal was fully equalled by that of his sister. If the ordinary conversation of the couple was of the same quality as their letters at this period, their life would have been passed in a continual interchange of devotional phrases.

At the end of the year 1647 Blaise and Jacqueline were settled in Paris, the health of the former seeming in a very critical condition. His malady was not such, however, as to keep him a close prisoner in the house ; he could, under favourable circumstances and on occasions, go abroad, which liberty he appears to have employed principally in visits to Port Royal. The fame of this house and of the Jansenists was already something talked of in Paris, and to anyone sharing the views of the sect the institution of Port Royal, which was the headquarters of the body, would have held strong attraction. Arnauld, St Cyran, and Singlin, whose names had become widely known, were to be met there ; and for the chance of hearing them speak their followers would gladly hurry thither. Amongst such were Pascal and his sister, and the words of Singlin would seem to have spurred them to a greater zeal ; so that in this form of diversion Pascal felt himself for the moment entirely satisfied.

But there were many days on which the state of his health would not permit that he left the house, and on these occasions he seems to have gathered round him such friends as he had in Paris,

discussing with them matters of theology and physics. It is at this time that Pascal made the acquaintance of Descartes, who visited him, and that more than once, for the double purpose of discussion and the giving of medical advice.

Jacqueline describes the meetings in a letter to Gilberte Perier, and from the manner in which she expresses herself, it would seem that the great philosopher produced no very favourable impression upon her.

At the first meeting Descartes, after admiring the arithmetic machine, fell to discussing the vacuum, on which subject it would seem that he and his host were at variance. A certain M. Roberval, one of Pascal's friends, fearing that the discussion might affect his health, interrupted Descartes and was himself about to voice Pascal's views. This the other was not willing to allow, and the party broke up with something of abruptness and ill-feeling. Descartes returned on more than one occasion and found the opportunity for prolonged discussion with the invalid, in which, however, they would never seem to have been in complete agreement.

The advice which Pascal was given by his

visitor in the matter of his health, he did not act upon. It is, indeed, very evident that such treatment would in no way fall in with his method of living ; for Descartes suggested that, as a principal condition, the patient should lie long abed of mornings, and that the patient was very loth to do. It is apparent from her description of his visits, that Jacqueline, in any case, had formed but small opinion of the distinguished guest ; and the writing of her letter shows clearly that she had no liking for the man and little respect for his learning.

This dislike is in no way to be wondered at, for at this time the brother and sister lacked sympathy for anyone not sharing their own religious devoutness ; and in this Descartes would be far from meeting their requirements. It is unlikely that from the other side the impression would have been of the warmest. Though to anyone of discernment the ability of Pascal would pass unquestioned, yet, since ability plays but a minor part in the formation of friendship, it is not improbable that Descartes felt the younger man to be a person lacking attractive qualities. For to all appearance Pascal was at the moment the

prey to an advanced bigotry, and so impressed with the pervading nature of his faith as to be inclined to voice his feeling and piety to all with whom he chanced to meet. It is not well to find idle fault with a man whose place is honoured and well marked in history ; but the other folly, that of refusing to take note of any weakness or failing because the life was great and true, is one both feeble and misleading, and fruitful of discomfort to all lesser mortals, who, not being permitted to find any wrong in the great dead, must either fancy them worse than in reality they were, or sadly feel discouragement, thinking themselves to be of very other clay. Therefore, in justice and for the reason that he was human, and, though distinguished from the common, should be judged as other men, Pascal should not be accorded praise at this most narrow period of his life. Be a man religious or be he not—the difference can in no way at all be counted—he should have some sympathy with the opinions of his fellows, and though he be a thousand times convinced that they are misguided and he alone upon a solid road, yet he should suppose them honest in their convictions, and for that reason meet them as his

equals. This for the moment Pascal was not ready to do. He would seem to have been carried forward on a wave of emotion, near bordering on hysteria, in which his vision was narrowed to a single view. Heaven, and the way that he would gain it, held captive all his thoughts ; that there were others on the same quest, but through a country more sunlit, he did not seem to see. The attitude is not uncommon, nor in a man of his age and history anything that brings surprise. If faith is to be without narrowness, it must have stood experience and the chance of years, so that he who has it may know that he is lucky rather than virtuous ; he must know that the cord by which he holds it is a very slender thread.

Pascal was without experience, and his attitude, new born, had scarcely withstood the wear of months. That he saw clearly where others went blind ; that he was a man of intellect and of a great force of reasoning, would not in this first encounter keep him from self-deception. For it is of the quality of faith that it shall not rest on reason, but is, in consequence, the reflection of the ideal of the man ; it is very real to him, but, unless he sees that its basis is within himself and

that it rests upon some emotion neither framed from logic nor the teaching of others, a chance wind may remove it. If, too, a man's faith shall be of any comfort to him, helping him to a kinder contact with his fellows, then he should know that it is a personal matter and belongs to him alone ; and though others may hold faiths of a like nature, yet, if this thing shall mean anything, it must be the property of each man by himself, so that a new-comer arriving with strange ideas, and ideals altogether different, shall not be judged harshly, but be seen to cast the anchor of his life as deep as other men, though he follow no set religion and bend the knee to no known God.

Pascal had had so little contact with his fellows that a ready sympathy would come but hardly to him. Though a man mature in the paths of learning, he was still a child in the affairs of men. He had been taught from infancy, and his growing years had strengthened the impression, that there was an answer to every riddle, and that one thing was wrong and the other right. He had come to the idea that a code of morals was a thing as easily arrived at as the solution of a problem in geometry ; that time, and circumstance,

and place should deeply alter that which a man should do, he would seem, at this time, to ignore. So, untouched by deeper inquiry, ignoring the life of others as something wrong which must therefore pass unknown, he shut himself for a while in a prison house of bigotry.

In a letter which he wrote at this time to his sister Gilberte, the attitude is well set forth. He writes: "De sorte que nous devons nous considérer comme des criminels dans une prison toute remplie des images de leur libérateur et des instructions nécessaires pour sortir de la servitude." That there were those who saw life something better than a prison and found other means of occupation than the anticipation of death, was to him evidence of existing evil.

In this state of extreme piety and narrowness Blaise Pascal and Jacqueline mutually encouraged each other during the first months of their residence in Paris. Not long after their arrival they obtained, through their acquaintanceship with M. Guilleberte, an introduction to certain of the prominent members of Port Royal de Paris. It was in one of his earlier visits here that Pascal found himself involved in a misunderstanding

with one of the directors, a certain M. Rebours. He describes the occurrence in a letter of 26th January 1648.

He had obtained an introduction to M. Rebours, had been warmly received and pressed to repeat his visit ; in a subsequent interview he stated his deep admiration for the writings of the Port Royalists, and further suggested that it would be possible by a very simple process of reasoning to refute much that their enemies laid against them. This was taken amiss, and Pascal was given to understand that the help of reason was not asked for in religious matters. M. Rebours, it would seem, being afraid that a mathematician of Pascal's quality might base his religion upon a question of reason, sought to improve the occasion with an exhortation to humility and modesty. "J'avoue," says Pascal, "que son discours était si beau, que si j'eusse cru être en l'état qu'il se figurait, il m'en eût retiré ; mais comme je ne pensais pas être dans cette maladie, je m'opposai au remède qu'il me présentait."

This misunderstanding was very unwelcome to the young man. Thinking that he saw some chance of serving those whom he so much admired,

he had made a suggestion with much good faith ; yet the thing had been taken amiss, and he had been forced to an attitude which was not his. It is a sign of the man that, even though the good opinion of M. Rebours was near to his heart, he would not alter his position, thinking himself to be in the right.

About this time Jacqueline made an announcement to her brother that should have caused him no surprise. She expressed her wish to take vows, and enter the religious life at Port Royal. Pascal showed himself in every way eager to further such a scheme ; and to this end Singlin was interviewed. He made the acquaintance of the intending novice, and then presented her to the Superior of Port Royal, Mère Angélique. In speaking to Pascal Singlin is said to have expressed his conviction that Jacqueline had the true instinct of conventual life, which statement, it appears, brought much joy and satisfaction to the brother and sister, but which seems of a most conventional nature, so that the question immediately rises whether Singlin had ever said otherwise to a girl who so fervently named her wish.

Henceforward it was the recognised endeavour

of Jacqueline that she should enter Port Royal, for which purpose she prepared herself with zeal, receiving encouragement and aid from Blaise. It would appear that Mme. Perier was aware of this intention, and her attitude shows something more of caution and regard for the feelings of her family, yet she in no way suggests that the goal is not such as is in itself desirable. Etienne Pascal, however, still working at Rouen, was altogether unaware of the ambitions of his daughter and the way in which she was encouraged by Blaise.

It is indeed surprising that a pair so eager for right living and so imbued with the importance of abstaining from all sin, should yet have failed in such complete fashion to obey the natural call of affection and the plain command of filial duty. To anyone less blinded by an enthusiasm of emotion the opinion of the father had surely been a thing to seek ; but the ethics of Pascal were of a different kind. The one end to which his endeavours were directed was the attaining Heaven ; things which stood, in his idea, off the main highway that led thither, such things as human love, and care, and thought for others, were set aside as prejudicial to his end.

The attitude is logical, yet far from being kind, and should serve to keep a man of ready sympathy and goodwill from any part in such religion. The one thing of importance—thus, it may be assumed, did Blaise Pascal and his sister argue—was that Jacqueline should devote her life entirely to the service of religion ; feeling that service to be her wish and pleasure, she would sin the more gravely should she turn her back on such a life. That others who had the claim of blood upon her, who had cared for her and who held her in deep affection, might suffer much and undeserved unhappiness through her action, was not considered in her presentation of the case.

Etienne Pascal, finishing his work at Rouen, came to Paris in May of 1648, and was no doubt struck by the increased austerity of his children. About the rest of his life, and the attitude into which he was forced in the matter of Jacqueline's entry at Port Royal, there is much that demands sympathy. Mme. Perier and those who describe the family history at this period would in some sort lay it to his discredit that he could not share the feelings of his daughter, and that, not sharing them, he refused her request ; yet his attitude

should not be difficult to understand, and alone of his family he shows any kindly warmth of human affection.

With Etienne Pascal at his house in Paris, the frequent visits of Blaise and Jacqueline to Port Royal, and the end to which the latter journeyed, would become impossible to hide ; so that, somewhat tardily, the father was told of how matters stood. Blaise explained the situation, and it is certain that he would in no way lack enthusiasm in the business, though it may be supposed he would take up an attitude in which there would show a too obvious satisfaction that his sister had chosen the path of holiness. The surprise of Etienne Pascal was complete, and since the request dealt with an issue of such importance, he withheld any decision in the matter. Upon reflection he saw the conduct of his son and daughter with growing anger, so that he appears to have reached a fine heat of indignation. It is with something of relief that one comes upon a passage in the elder Pascal's life in which he did not sacrifice his own feelings to the will of his children ; in his decision upon Jacqueline's request the man shows at once more dignified and of a greater strength of character.

Having duly considered the proposal, he answered Jacqueline that he could not comply with her wishes, and that he forbade her entry to any religious house ; to Blaise he brought reproach for his share in the matter, maintaining that his confidence in him had been misplaced, and that in encouraging his sister in this matter he had committed a grave wrong. He forbade further communication with Port Royal, and, to see that his orders were carried into force, and perhaps to mark the more sharply his lack of confidence, he set an old servant to watch the movements of the pair. Yet, either this superintendence was of no very close nature, or the brother and sister exhibited a considerable ingenuity, for a constant communication continued to exist between Jacqueline and the Port Royalists.

Blaise Pascal and his sister accepted the decision of their father without revolt, though what the relations of the family were at this moment is a matter resting upon supposition. From a letter of Jacqueline to her father, which bears this date, a resignation that yet carries much suggestion of hardly treated virtue is apparent. In Blaise Pascal it is almost impossible to suppose an attitude free

from all trace of that meek acceptance of the circumstances which is one of the most galling weapons in the armoury of the Puritan. Pascal was so honestly persuaded that his way of seeing was right and true that he would surely face any opposition that he might meet, not with surprise and anger, for he was well aware that such opposition must come, but with that assured conviction of persecuted virtue that shows pity for an opponent so very far astray.

That which Pascal thought at this period of his life is not entirely unknown. Unless he was one of those uncommon beings who in their most serious utterances are urgent to give a false impression of themselves—and such a man not even the most fanciful of imaginations could suppose him to be—his writings at this time should give the true picture of what he was.

Besides certain letters, there are two manuscripts from which the man may be read: *La Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies*, which belongs to the year 1647–1648, and *l'Écrit sur la Conversion du Pécheur*, of about the same date. There has been some doubt cast upon the authenticity of the *Écrit sur la Conversion du Pécheur*, but

such would appear to be ill-founded, and the work would seem to carry the mark of his style and character.

In these first years of fervent religion, to which is often given the title of the "first conversion," the outward conduct of Pascal differs but little from the ordinary behaviour of those persons who, in all ages, have considered that to shut their eyes to light, and movement, and joy is something of a virtue. Yet in the circumstances which led him to this position he had something more than common cause. His was a mind active beyond the common, seeking always the explanation of that which passed within his knowledge, of great activity and full of pleasure in achievement, hopeful that the work which was before it might be speedily confronted. To such a mind inactivity would be a very hateful thing, nor could pleasure have been an acquaintance but slightly known. To a man happy in his particular labour, there is a joy of conquest which is of the foundation of his life; he must, unless he be without imagination, in which case his work is not likely to progress far, find a pleasure in the position which he holds among other workers. He will feel that he has

part in the business of the world, and so come to a closer contact and a deeper sympathy with his fellows ; for it is not possible that a man shall continue absorbed in an occupation and yet hold all men, and all men's endeavours, in a fine contempt. But if the worker be thrown suddenly from his employment, and so placed that the possibility of taking up again his past occupation with any of his former fire is gone beyond all hope, then his outlook will suffer the severest change. To Pascal the discharge from his employment was of the most final kind ; his health failed him, and that with a hopeless completeness. He was not a man struck down by some illness, but an invalid whose strength had disappeared, not through some cause that might be removed, but seemingly because the body was too weak to bear the strain upon it. A man so placed may well turn himself about to find some outlet to the prison-house wherein he stands.

To Pascal the position would seem to have appeared impossible ; finding himself cut off from that which he had planned, he turned to religion, seeking there the happiness that he so much desired. And there he found the promise of that

which neither sickness nor the chances of this world could in any way affect. So, pushed forward by the strength of his emotion, he groped despairing to a light, fixing his eyes upon it and not heeding whither his path took him, nor whether the way was good, only seeing that at the end there seemed a light. And so in the joy of his new quest he wrote that passionate and mournful prayer.

For all that there is in it an abandonment and a self-abasement that do not come well upon the lips of a man whose part in life is not yet played, the prayer is full of human character, and in its closing sentences would show that hope had not yet altogether died within the writer.

“Vous m’aviez donné la santé pour vous servir, et j’en ai fait un usage tout profane.” Thus he writes at the beginning of his lament, when the abandonment of his mood yet held him in the deep of humility. “Si j’ai eu le cœur plein d’affection du monde pendant qu’il a eu quelque vigueur, anéantissez cette vigueur pour mon salut ; et rendez moi incapable de jouir du monde, soit par faiblesse de corps, soit par zèle de charité, pour ne jouir que de vous seul.” In such fashion he

continues, crying that his life has been idly spent, and that those things which form the pleasures of mortals must surely pass with death. Such a contempt of health and the joy of living is not easily come upon except in illness.

Lest death should surprise him before he has taken count that earthly things are of small worth, he prays the intervention of his God ; for, and this cry he repeats with bitter emphasis, as if telling of some sin heavy beyond the common wont, the love of human pleasures is still that which calls him. "Mais je reconnais, mon Dieu, que mon cœur est tellement endurci et plein des idées, des soins, des inquiétudes et des attachements du monde, que la maladie non plus que la santé . . . ni tous mes efforts, ni ceux de tout le monde ensemble ne peuvent rien du tout pour commencer ma conversion, si vous n'accompagnez toutes ces choses d'une assistance tout extraordinaire de votre grâce." And later the same cry : "L'idée du monde y est tellement gravée, que la vôtre n'est plus connaissable."

Pursuing this idea, he continues in a frenzy of abasement, protesting that the love of that which is lasting and holy is not strong within him, and

that the mercy of God will surely be withheld. In such spirit he cries out : "O qu'heureux sont ceux qui avec une liberté entière et une pente invincible de leur volonté aimant parfaitement et librement ce qu'ils sont obligés d'aimer nécessairement."

It is hard to place an exact meaning on words which have been written in the crisis of a strong emotion ; it is above all things easy to exaggerate their import, and perhaps find something that the author never set there ; but this would seem the cry of a man who, feeling himself influenced by circumstances, knows that he does not move without suggestion, and who would gladly shake off the compulsion, going freely where he now is forced, yet cannot do so.

The prayer goes on, but with an altering note. Pascal still humbly begs that he may be brought to throw aside all affection for this world ; the misery of his condition is still clear written in his words ; but the man would seem to feel some hope waking within him, and though fearful of his lot among men, begins to find that there is some greatness in his suffering. "Tout ce que je suis vous est odieux, et je ne trouve rien en

moi qui vous puisse agréer. Je n'y vois rien, Seigneur, que mes seules douleurs qui ont quelque ressemblance avec les vôtres." Here at least he is upon a more hopeful way, and seems to forget the love which he still holds for the world, comforting himself with the thought that through suffering and pain he will come to his desires. In a fashion that shows how much there was of the common character of men in this most strange and brilliant thinker, he builds up a doctrine of life based on his own case. There is here no question of doubt about the faith which he professed ; his one idea is to find that which may again bring comfort and hope to his days. In Christ he sees an image of sorrow and pain ; and in that he gathers comfort, so that the path of his existence again shows clear. It is the way of suffering that man must tread ; through suffering alone is any good to be obtained on earth. Himself a man who must taste much of pain, he decides that this should be the lot of all men, and that without it all living is an idle thing. So in the achievement of the prayer Pascal adopts an attitude less despairing, but yet of no more breadth or kindlier outlook on the world. It is indeed little more than egoistic, founded

entirely on the life that the author himself saw stretching out before him ; for to claim for Christ, and therefore for those who would follow Him, only suffering and a life of melancholy rejoicing in the approach of death, is a suggestion that would put a very ugly reading upon a fine chapter of man's history.

At the end of his writing, when the strength of his supplication would be somewhat spent, Pascal voices that which would seem to show the weakness of his whole attitude, and the hope that in his contempt of the world and its pleasures he might be himself deceived. The love of brighter things is strong in him, and he cannot force himself to say that he would have sickness alone, even though in that he sees a sterner preparation for his heaven.

“Seigneur, je sais que je ne sais qu'une chose ; c'est qu'il est bon de vous suivre, et qu'il est mauvais de vous offenser. Après cela, je ne sais lequel est le meilleur ou le pire en toutes choses ; je ne sais lequel m'est profitable de la santé ou de la maladie, des biens ou de la pauvreté, ni de toutes les choses du monde.”

Here is something that rings true ; some doubt that the dark may be necessary. In this whole

prayer there is a note of strain and delusion, as of a man seeking to make the best of that which he can see, yet not greatly confident in his power of vision. There is a want of assurance that multiplies asseverations, so that through continued repetition conviction may arise.

When Pascal wrote *l'Écrit sur la Conversion du Pécheur*, he showed himself in a much calmer mood. There is in this writing less of ecstasy and fire, but more of assurance and of quieter thought. It would seem an effort of the author to put down his feelings so that he might realise the position where he stood.

He begins with a description of the unrest and trouble that may come, causelessly, into a man's estimation of his life. "Elle (l'âme) ne peut plus goûter avec tranquillité les choses qui la charmaient. . . . Mais elle trouve encore plus d'amertume dans les exercices de piété que dans les vanités du monde." And later he continues: "Elle considère les choses périssables comme périssantes et même déjà périées ; et dans la vue certaine de l'anéantissement de tout ce qu'elle aime, elle s'effraye dans cette considération, et voyant que chaque instant lui arrache la jouissance de son

bien et que ce qui lui est le plus cher s'écoule a tout moment, et qu'enfin un jour certain viendra auquel elle se trouvera dénuée de toutes les choses aux-quelles elle avait mis son espérance. . . . De là vient qu'elle commence à considérer comme un néant tout ce qui doit retourner dans le néant, le ciel, la terre, son esprit, son corps, ses parents, ses amis, ses ennemis, les biens, la pauvreté, la disgrâce, la prospérité, l'honneur, l'ignominie, l'estime, le mépris, l'autorité, l'indigence, la santé, la maladie, et la vie même."

This is the calmer expression of the attitude which he takes up at the beginning of the *Prière*. The vanity of human things : the cry is as old as the history of man and is born of adversity.

Pascal next claims that the sinner will realise the blindness of his intellect and turn elsewhere for sight. He insists that, since all human joys must end with death, even if man may find some pleasure in such things, he is unwise to attach himself to happiness that shall so soon be gone. He argues that, seeing that this human enjoyment is so temporary, the mind of man will revolt from it, and seek something that shall be eternal, and that in the idea of God this permanent joy will be

found. In this idea, man will have something that he cannot lose in this life or after death : “et sa raison aidée de la lumière de la grâce lui fait connaître qu’il n’y a rien de plus aimable que Dieu et qu’il ne peut être ôté qu’ à ceux qui le rejettent, puisque c’est le posséder que de le désirer, et que le refuser c’est le perdre.”

He maintains that man will lose himself in abasement before the idea of God, seeing in his own life nothing but that which is vile and inconsiderable.

He points out that though the sinner, in view of these considerations, may wish to enter the paths of religion, he likely may not know his way ; for that reason, therefore, he must turn to those who make it their business to show this road.

In all this, in the *Prière* as in this other writing, the attitude of Pascal is the same. The man is sick in mind and body and thinks that he has happened upon some cure for his ill. He does not question the matter of his cure, does not in any way inquire into the authority on which it is based, but only sees that it promises that which he would have. His religion taught him that in

a heaven after death he would find true and perfect happiness, and that to enter this heaven he must in all things obey the God who ruled in it. Believing this, the way at once became easy for him, and the ensuring of eternal pleasure a thing not impossible to come upon. Therefore he asked no question in the matter, but with both hands seized the comfort that was before him.

Dimly and without understanding he seems, at this time, to be aware of vast shapes moving within his vision. The infinite and man's hopeless struggle to face it, human littleness and the unmeasured longings that stir within a form so feeble and a mind so poor, these move vaguely in his understanding ; yet he does not pause to think of what they mean, but, taking the explanation already offered him by the priests of his religion, he sets his mind on a future state in which he shall see more clearly, and seeks only to ensure his entry there.

The stake was too large, the hope of winning too strong, to let speculation tempt him to risk another throw. He had fallen to the depths of physical misery, had seen the world and those things which pleased him pass from his grasp ;

then had come the vision of new aims and new ambitions, and again a brighter sky ; so that in a frenzy of relief he saw himself once more with hopes and longings, and shut his eyes to other things. Believing himself to be once more on solid ground, making for a goal that could not escape him, " *puisque c'est le posséder que de le désirer,*" he busied himself with his single ideal, and was content. And so employed he could find but little sympathy for those who did not share his labours, thinking them weak and foolish to pursue their paltry toils, shutting his eyes to the love that was still in him for those same human businesses, unmindful that there lay sleeping, in his mind, that which would stir him to a further questioning, and reduce him to a new and worse despair.

CHAPTER V

VERY soon after the declaration of Jacqueline's intention to devote herself to a conventual life, Etienne Pascal moved his dwelling in Paris. The details of the family life at this time are very hard to come upon. Gilberte Perier, in her life of Blaise, passes over the whole of these years with an appearance of shamed haste, saying only that her brother, having ruined his health by prolonged labour, was urgently advised by his doctor to seek amusement in the world, and that he for a time did so employ himself. In the memoir on the life of Jacqueline some further detail is given of the family movements until the death of Etienne Pascal, but the information is very meagre, the recital being in the main part occupied with the narration of Jacqueline's austerities.

It is, indeed, a curious though very obvious fact, that those who knew Blaise Pascal and who

had knowledge of the manner in which he spent the next half dozen years of his life, show themselves resolute to maintain the strictest silence on this subject, stating simply that for a time he sought relief in the pleasures of the world.

It would appear from such information as may be come upon, that Pascal's health began to show beginnings of improvement about the year 1648, or early in 1649, and that with the strengthening of his body there came a return of that mental activity which would not alone content itself with the preparation for post-mortal joy. He in no way showed himself at war with his former sentiments, but the strictness of his attitude became slowly relieved. Port Royal still claimed much of his sympathy; the teaching of the Jansenists attracted him as strongly as before; but action again entered into his life, and he began to move among his fellows, taking pleasure in discussion, in the competition of his mind with others, and in all the changing interests that occupy human society.

It would be of the first interest to know how he acted towards Jacqueline, and whether, after so enthusiastic a championship of her pious intentions,

there came no cooling of his ardour, and that almost on the morrow of her important decision. It is not likely that the change in Pascal would have been accomplished with any great rapidity, or that in his manner there would be a marked alteration ; yet the outburst had been so fiery, and youth and his own passionate nature had carried him so far to an excess of zeal, that when his health again allowed a more than single interest, his behaviour had surely shown him standing aside where before he led.

How soon the family became aware of the more natural aims that had entered into Pascal's life it is hard to say ; but that this wider outlook was not long unnoticed seems, from the hints of Gilberte Perier and of her daughter Marguerite, altogether evident. It may be supposed that Pascal showed a greater liking for a society that was not entirely Puritan, that the subjects with which he occupied himself dealt with science and not religion, and that he made no shame of his amusement in purely social happenings. Living in such fashion, he would quickly feel himself at variance with his sister's way of life. It is not possible that, while the one sought the multiplication

of his interests and the other the suppression of all ideas save that of contemplating heaven, the pair could have continued in their former agreement.

In May 1649, when the effects of Pascal's better health would still be in their beginnings, Etienne Pascal paid a visit to his native town of Clermont, taking with him his son and daughter. Here the family would be known to a number of persons who had not seen them for many years, and the occasions of hospitable entertainment would not be few. There is no mention that Blaise behaved in the manner of Jacqueline, and with the affectation of much horror fled all such gatherings ; it would seem more probable that he acted in the opposite fashion. It need not be supposed that Pascal was a man devoid of all vanity, and that he was unaffected by the good opinion of those about him, so that the welcome which he should receive at Clermont should leave him without satisfaction. His fame as a mathematician was established and much thought of ; he was a native of the town where his father had long been known and respected ; and with such introduction he would scarcely fail to find some measure of popularity. He would encounter men of education ready to

hear with delight of his experiments ; he would be burdened with a hospitality that is seldom lacking for the great man, and would need to be a person of much insensibility, the which he most certainly was not, if he did not perceive himself to be the centre of an unusual attraction. And when he came home to the family table, it were strange if he did not notice the sad aspect of his sister : cold from long vigils in a room which lacked a fire ; clothed in the garments of a woman beyond her years, and those of the most uncomfortable form that might be procured ; speaking little and affecting a distaste of eating ; making it plainly known to all about her that she dwelt apart from men, and led an austere life.

During the seventeen months that Etienne Pascal and his family spent at Clermont there is no event of importance, or even of minor interest, recorded by those who have written the biography of Pascal. All that can be discovered in this period is the increasing asceticism of Jacqueline, so that before November of 1650, at which time the family of Pascal went back to Paris, she appears no longer fit company for other persons, but absorbed in a solitary and purely egoistic life.

In Paris the life of the household would be much the same as at Clermont ; Blaise would frequent a society more illustrious than in the provinces, and would have larger play for the exercise of his talent ; he would find himself in closer contact with the discussions of the day ; would perceive a growing antagonism to the Jansenist sect ; and would discover that the interests which were his brought him into a wider circle of acquaintance and to a more kindly view of his fellows. Being a man of accepted merit, he passed where others of his birth and station might not find entrance ; and it would be a thing almost against reason that this man, who more than all his fellows lived the moments of his life, jealously seeking the utmost joy that might be there, should find no interest in a circle showing so many and such varied aims. And as a setting to this brighter coloured picture, he would have the sombre religious life. Jacqueline surely served to point the contrast. Her long hours of vigil, her loneliness, her deliberate abandonment of that which he now shared with others, would force him to review his standpoint, and name himself either weakly fallen from the path of wisdom, or but

newly come to a perception of the real value of man's life.

To adopt the vision of Gilberte Perier, of Marguerite, and of those others who have hinted at and not described this period of his life, and to see him, believing that the road of prayer and fasting, dark with the shadow of death, was the true way, yet for the moment turning from it because of the attraction of the very moderate pleasures of a sober, honest man, is a thing that common sense and the history of his life can in no way hold as true.

In September 1651 Etienne Pascal was seized with a serious illness, grew rapidly worse, and died on the 24th of the month. Blaise and Jacqueline were about his death-bed, Gilberte and M. Perier being detained at Clermont. The death of his father must have been a very bitter blow to Pascal. The pair had been more closely allied than is often common in a father and son; the boy, when still very young, had been permitted to discuss mathematics with his father and his friends; Etienne Pascal had made his son's education his own care; so that the brilliant success which came to the pupil could not do other than rejoice the

teacher. It is possible to see in the elder Pascal a father something too ready to indulge his children's fancies ; it would be the purest injustice to deny him sympathy and interest in all that they might do. Therefore when Etienne Pascal died, Blaise suffered not only the loss of one to whom he bore a natural and deep affection, but also the withdrawal of a criticism that had never wearied, and of an enthusiasm and admiration which had surely done much to help him in his work.

In a letter to M. Perier, which is written on the subject of his father's death, Pascal shows his feelings at the moment, and the changed view which the last two years had brought him. It is not possible to find unaltered the man who wrote the *Prière pour le bon usage des Maladies* and he who sent this letter on his father's death. In the one and in the other there is an unquestioning faith in religion ; in both there sounds loud the strong conviction that only after death may true happiness be found ; yet in the *Prière* there is only subjection and misery, the cry of longing that if suffering is borne patiently the future may bring no pain and some reward, and in this letter there is something much less mournful, a note of

courage, that would proclaim the fight no such intolerable thing, that would suggest the fighter not yet wearied of his part.

Much that there is in this letter, as Pascal himself maintains, is not other than the teaching of the Christian Church upon the question of death and the way it should be regarded ; yet there is also in the method of expression and in the sentiments which he upholds, that which must show the author no longer wholly pessimistic of the worth of human efforts. Pascal now sees in the love of life, and of himself, something not wrong and to be overcome with prayer, but natural and just and right.

“Ne quittons donc pas,” he writes, “cet amour que la nature nous a donné pour la vie, puisque nous l’avons reçu de Dieu ; mais que ce soit pour la même vie pour laquelle Dieu nous l’a donné, et non pas pour un objet contraire.” If a man do right, if he live justly and hate that which is wrong, then he may without sin hold his life a precious thing ! Such a sentiment is surely a departure from the gloomy vision of the *Prière*. A little later he continues : “C’est un des grands principes du Christianisme, que tout ce qui est

arrivé à Jésus-Christ doit se passer et dans l'âme et dans le corps de chaque chrétien." History records that Christ did not avoid the ordinary pleasures of men ; and this Pascal knew. And later he continues :—

“Ainsi nous tirerons avantage de nos propres imperfections . . . car c'est le but des vrais chrétiens de profiter de leurs propres imperfections, parce que tout coopère en bien pour les élus.” Since he could recognise that in the weakness and evil of men there was not only matter for despair, Pascal had broken the isolation of fanaticism and come again to dwell in the society of men.

The writer continues, asking that through the memory of the dead the living may be brought to a still closer affection, and finishes, as a man will often do in writing to those whom he knows well, with a note that is properly for himself and not for those who read. “L'homme,” he says, “est assurément trop infirme pour pouvoir juger sainement de la suite des choses futures. Espérons donc en Dieu, et ne nous fatiguons pas par des prévoyances indiscrètes et téméraires.” It was surely not for Gilberte Perier and for her husband that he wrote this warning, since in all that may be

found of the lives of this couple there is no suggestion that they would voyage far on any sea of speculation. Yet for himself he had, perhaps, wished to repeat this advice, knowing there was that in him which must seek more light upon the future, fearful to begin the quest lest he might find a still blacker dark.

Blaise Pascal and Jacqueline being alone in Paris after the death of their father, it may be supposed that they led a somewhat secluded life. It is not possible to obtain information on the point, but it would seem likely that Jacqueline in no way altered her solitary and devotional existence ; yet it is certain that she did not inform her brother that she should very shortly leave him. In November of 1651 Gilberte Perier came to Paris, and was immediately the recipient of Jacqueline's confidence. The entrance at Port Royal was to be set about without delay, and Jacqueline desired to assume her position as a novice as soon as the preliminaries might be settled. Yet no word of this was said to Pascal. Gilberte Perier explains that her sister wished that this silence should be maintained to avoid useless unhappiness for her brother ; it is

possible that this unhappiness would have found practical expression, and that if the devotee was desirous to avoid all interference, she but served her own interests in naming those of Blaise.

So the preparations were carried on, and Pascal knew nothing of them, but was content at the thought that Jacqueline would live with him for at least the year ensuing on their father's death. By the end of December all preparations were complete, and the 4th January 1652 was fixed for the day on which Jacqueline Pascal should finally leave the world and its temptations, preferring a life of prayer and meditation to the call of affection and self-denial.

On the night of 3rd January Jacqueline was struck, somewhat tardily, by the necessity of informing Blaise of that which should happen on the morrow. This she would not do herself, but trusted to the goodwill and tact of Gilberte, and withdrew for further prayers. Mme. Perier set about the task with—to make use of her own expression—what precaution she might, and, it would seem to him who reads the story after, a great lack of courage ; for even in this eleventh hour, when nothing but force could have set aside

the progress of the matter, she failed in a true statement of the case and had recourse to compromise. Jacqueline, she stated, was to enter Port Royal, and that in a few hours, but—she may here be pictured as hurrying her words, in a fever to lessen the force of her announcement—it was not to be other than a retreat in which she should savour and weigh the merits of the religious life. Pascal received the news with very great distress, and sadly went to his own room to review the import of this loss. When he had shut himself up, Jacqueline ventured from her retreat ; heard of her brother's sorrow ; and also that even in the moment of surprise he had spoken kindly of her ; and then retired to bed, where alone among that household she slept quiet till morning.

The hours of that January night were likely among the longest and most bitter of all Blaise Pascal's life. A man, be he philosopher or ploughman, cannot look upon the ending of a cherished way of life, and think upon the future in which he shall trace no one familiar feature, with quiet, unanxious eyes ; on the eve of the new venture his rest may well be troubled. Pascal had never

left his family nor made his way alone ; death and that which would be as final, yet was not necessary, had set him by himself, so that for the first time he faced a future in which there should be no close affection and no companion always near to hand. And this last blow, this thing shutting upon his sister cold gates which his love was powerless to tear away, he had himself gone far to bring about. It is not a pleasant thing to put forward an opinion, and then, believing the matter based in error, to name oneself mistaken and at fault ; but when in the heat of first conviction others have been persuaded to the same mistake, and they go on and leave him who first guided them to retrace his steps alone, seeing them in error and knowing himself the chief cause of their fault, then the thing is very hard to bear. Therefore it is little wonder if Pascal turned upon his bed, and found time run slow and dawn hold long her day.

The behaviour of the two women in this occurrence is of the strangest. Both the sisters were possessed of a very real affection for their brother, and both professed, and that in an extreme degree, their love of just dealing and the straight

path of good ; yet had they dealt with one for whom they felt both dislike and fear, and had they been concerned in some shameful business, their conduct had surely not been other than it was. The force of religious fervour, which moved Jacqueline and, less strongly, Gilberte in this affair, is very quick to blind the eyes to all but the one object ; but some slight concern for others, some knowledge of an honest, open course, is not too much to ask from those who, though for the moment carried forward on the wave of their desire, have yet lived among men and learnt at least a measure of self-control. It is clear that the end to which Jacqueline moved was not to be foregone on the count of thought for others, and that she would carry out her pleasure though she caused suffering by her action ; that the business was brought about with so much stealth, and that, with the profession of high virtues upon her lips, she should sink to such mean dealings and to final action so wanting in directness, is a wrong to which her piety can show no counterbalance. It is not possible that either of the sisters could have seen in their conduct on this winter evening only that which was best for Blaise and for themselves.

When that which shall bring hurt to others has been done deliberately and from a motive considered just, it is better that the truth be stated and that the persons most nearly concerned have free speech together, so that in a last explanation the true motives may be shown, and in a free discussion all secrecy may pass.

No opposition being offered by her brother, and being convinced of the virtue in her action, Jacqueline Pascal, then in her twenty-seventh year, formally renounced her part in worldly cares and interests and entered the establishment of Port Royal des Champs with the title of Sœur Euphémie, the fourth day of January of the year 1652.

So to the next period of his life Pascal enters more lonely than he had been before; perhaps, too, with some sense of injury which should help him, since he was a man of spirit, to seek with more exactness the pleasant things in life. In these years the story of his life becomes obscure, so that only at intervals, and then for the briefest period, he may be seen with any clearness. In these infrequent glimpses there appears a man gaining knowledge, moving and seeing, not un-

happy ; an austere liver tasting wine and finding it, not that poison which his former thoughts had made it, nor yet a drink to charm away all ills, only a liquid that should be in man's usage, as soup and bread and all things that may keep him well and give him comfort.

CHAPTER VI

PASCAL, left to himself, would seem to have made a determined effort to draw something other than disappointment and regret from his daily life. To this end he mixed with enthusiasm in that society to which he had access ; for it is not possible to suppose him occupying himself in something that did not gain his full attention. He was no poor devil who must needs kill time, thinking himself well placed if he escape boredom, rather he would live the hours that came to him, and, were they sorrowful or happy, take the full measure of all they might contain.

It should be at this time, shortly after the entry of Jacqueline at Port Royal, that he made the acquaintance of M. de Roannez. Though Pascal was not inclined to seek with too much ardour the companionship of those whose position was superior to his own, it is probable that he was not

unaware of some satisfaction when an intimacy rapidly advanced between himself and this young noble. M. de Roannez, grandson of the Duc de Roannez, grand-nephew of the Comte d'Harcourt, a man of high birth and assured position, was not yet twenty when he first met Pascal. Interested in the discussions of men of parts, yet himself without much education, he was at once attracted by his new acquaintance. It is not improbable that de Roannez cast into this new friendship something of hero-worship, and that Pascal, a young man accorded the title of genius, appeared to him a very splendid fellow ; it is certain that the pair came quickly to a great intimacy, and that de Roannez sought the other's company upon all possible occasions.

The noble, very enthusiastic in his friendship, thought himself happy in offering hospitality to his friend. In this fashion, and since the younger man was in no way to be denied, and the elder had no wish to save himself from this companion, the couple spent much of their time together ; and the Hôtel de Roannez was open at all times to Pascal.

The young noble, moreover, had a liking for travel, and seeing that the roads were bad and

progress often slow, he was the more anxious to have those about him whose talk might send the hours quickly by ; so that meeting Pascal and conceiving a great liking for him, he was not content until his travels were shared by so delightful a companion. In this matter he gained his way on at least one occasion, and it is not improbable that the couple took the road together more than once. On one such journey it happened that the Chevalier de Méré, himself somewhat famed for wit, was of the party, and he has left a record of the impression that Pascal made upon him. It would appear from his telling that outside of mathematics Pascal was ill-instructed, and that those things which were familiar to the others, the current gossip of art and letters, were new and strange to him, and this in so marked a degree that his questions and comments caused, by their ingenuous character, no small amusement to his hearers. Yet this at least the Chevalier acknowledges, though in his general estimate he set no high value on the new acquaintance : he found that, when better instructed in these matters, Pascal showed himself a wise and sympathetic critic.

But of the general character of their behaviour, of the spirit in which de Roannez and Pascal took the road, of how they jested, if they did jest, of the way they looked upon the sunset, saw the country changing as they journeyed, met bad weather, and faced the fatigues and mishaps of the traveller, there is no record left. For thus it is with great men ; all who set about to write their lives must see them in the one light only, the soldier fighting, the preacher with words of faith for ever on his lips, the politician playing nought but his high game. It would seem that in making the biography of some man set prominent above his fellows, a blindness comes upon the writer, so that he is no longer concerned with the human life of him he writes of, but only with his public rôle. The man is lost in his achievement, and the public gapes at something not at all resembling other men. Yet they had passions such as we have, felt hunger, the need of friendship and the sense of joy ; sometimes, and that not seldom, they forgot their high endeavours and played and spoke as other men. And we who will not likely trouble the historian with the story of our lives, would know something of the kind

of men they were, of how they spoke and moved and acted, not on the great stage whereon they made such show, but in the quiet of their daily lives ; so that when we take our pleasure from their writings, or read of their effective deeds, we may conjure up some vision of their faces and their smiles, their laughter and their folly, and how they lived with other men ; and in the vision come to know them, and look on them as friends.

And so with Pascal, the man is unrecorded and forgotten, and those who knew him thought to set down only his skill in mathematics, his fine style of writing, and the outward seeming of his religious life ; yet we had seen the man more clearly, taken his meaning also with a greater sureness, had we known something of his simple doings. To have one faithful picture of his words and actions with de Roannez upon the road, would be to throw a clearer light on all his works.

Pascal's visits to the Hôtel de Roannez appear to have been very frequent ; it was, indeed, no uncommon thing for him to pass the night there ; and that he might the more easily do this, and that he might feel himself at home within the house, a suite of rooms was set at his disposal.

Since he was thus a frequent guest of the family, and since he was the chosen friend of young de Roannez, it is not probable that there was any lack of intimacy between himself and the other members of the household. He was, moreover, a man who easily conveyed the impression of his genius ; he bore some mark of suffering, and was not unlikely accredited an energy that should vanquish the problems of the mind in spite of the weakness of his feeble body. He was, in the common phrase, an interesting man. In the Hôtel de Roannez he would see much of his friend's sister, and would have frequent opportunity of conversation with the lady, since, as her brother's friend, this at least would scarcely be denied him. We may suppose him something unused to the society of women, probably very serious and formal in his address, feeling himself in strange and unknown places, yet showing, for the observant eyes that watched him, a real pleasure.

And for Mlle. de Roannez the acquaintance would have some attraction, for unless she were less than human, the attention of a man so able, who was, moreover, said to pay little heed to

women, surely brought her satisfaction. So the intimacy would ripen and the pair come to a greater knowledge of each other. Whether the matter went farther and whether the man gave any intimation of a different sentiment, it is not possible to know, nor does it in any way affect the case. For Pascal had certainly never thought that with his birth and his position he might seek his wife in the sister of a duke and peer of France. That he may have told Mlle. de Roannez of his affection for her ; or that his conduct may have made this clear, so that she would no longer have the matter hid ; or that on the one side and the other no mention of their feelings was made ; are matters that cannot be settled. But that Pascal did feel, and that with the strong passion that was of his nature, affection for some woman, seems a fact beyond dispute. For in the years 1652 and 1653 he wrote that famous *Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour*, which carries little sign of the pedant writing of that of which he does not know. The pamphlet would seem authentic, written by Pascal or one who had his gifts and his expression, and if there was such another, he had surely gained an equal fame. That the *Discours* lay for a long

time unnoticed and not included in his works, argues somewhat in its favour, for those who first had the publication of his writings were much concerned with one end: they must represent him as asceticism incarnate, turn and cut his work to favour this impression, suppressing, and that with sternness, all that showed him as a man with passions who took part in earthly joy. It would seem, then, a matter to be little doubted that Pascal put on paper that which he knew of love, and that the strength of the emotion which inspired him to this writing was very great indeed.

It is very certain that he met Mlle. de Roannez on a footing of close friendship; the letters which he afterwards wrote to her should show that beyond dispute. It is most unlikely, and is without supporting evidence, that he was on terms of any intimacy with another woman; it should be, therefore, from his friend's sister alone that he learnt the love of men and women.

So for a while he lived his life among his fellows; laughed, ate, and joined with others in the fashions of the day; bandied words with wits and men of letters, found pleasure in trifles, and paid court to a noble lady. The picture has a richer colour and

would seem of greater value than that of him who wrote the *Prière* ; for the sight of a man doing the best he may with life, determined that in it there is something good, brings more of comfort and of admiration to those who see it than the long face crying that all is bad. Yet Pascal might not live this new life undisturbed, but must be constantly reminded of what his days had been ; the melancholy face of Jacqueline would come before him, and she would employ the minutes of their interviews in an attempt to persuade him to renounce the world.

At first Pascal was moved to resentment against those who had assisted Jacqueline in her entry to Port Royal. To one who had shared the religious fervour which moved her, the selfishness of the motive had been quite plain, and indignation at the decision had grown strong. In such spirit he writes : “Ma sœur fit hier profession, jeudi 5 juin 1652. Il m’a été impossible de retarder : M^{rs} de Port Royal craignaient qu’un petit retardement en apportât un grand et voulaient la hâter par cette raison qu’ils espèrent la mettre bientôt dans les charges ; et partant il faut hâter, parce qu’il faut qu’elles aient pour cela plusieurs années

de profession. Voilà de quoi ils m'ont payé." There is here no great love for the "M^{rs} de Port Royal" who would make the separation of the writer and his sister a matter from which there should be no going back.

This attitude of anger towards Port Royal, and perhaps of indignation towards his sister herself, was fostered in Pascal by that which occurred between the beginning of Jacqueline's noviciate and her final taking of vows. In a letter of 7th March 1652, she writes to him in a strain that could scarcely fail to arouse his anger; there is much talk of humility to the will of God, of the duty of kindness to others; there is a continual protestation of the love that the writer bears for her brother; and throughout there runs the statement that his goodwill or his opposition do not vitally affect the matter, that the vows will be taken whether he will or not. Pascal was never of those men whose conduct is based upon the moment's influence, his actions were not made without due thought; except on those occasions when a fanatic humbleness had brought him to complete despair of all his efforts, he would accept the burden of his own decision and satisfy himself that what he

did was right. Therefore it would add nothing to his contentment that Jacqueline should write to him on this occasion, when assuredly he felt himself as a man suffering an unkind treatment, with all the unction of one doing good and on that count falling in the estimate of others. It is not surprising to find that, when he received the news that Jacqueline would make her profession at the ensuing feast of Trinity, he met his sister with a show of opposition. "Il vint le lendemain," writes Jacqueline to Gilberte, "fort outré avec un grand mal de tête que cela lui causait, et néanmoins fort adouci, car au lieu de deux ans qu'il me demandait la dernière fois, il ne voulait plus me faire attendre que jusqu'à la Toussaint."

Having done all that he might, and failing to achieve his object, Pascal saw his sister take the final vows and separate herself, beyond the point of coming back, from all contact with the world; and for the next two years, though never at open quarrel with Port Royal or with Jacqueline, it is not possible that he should have here bestowed any warmth of sympathy. Time did not hang heavy on his hands; he moved in a society which professed a great horror of dullness; he was

attracted to a woman, and felt that there lay before him many paths all full of a great promise, and none of which he knew. We may suppose him going about his pleasures and his business with that air of diffidence and joy that he, who has been kept from knowledge of such things, displays on the occasion of his first contact with social life. He took part in that which fashion ordered at the moment, and not improbably drew satisfaction from the act. He accompanied his friend de Roannez in a coach with four or even six horses, took, that is to say, his recreation in the manner of a noble, and was accordingly distinguished from his class, to whom etiquette forbade the use of so many animals. When enjoying himself in this fashion, while crossing the bridge at Neuilly, the horses took fright and went near to hurling the coach and its occupants into the river; for a moment, or so runs the story, Pascal found himself in face of violent death, but, the disaster being averted, no harm was done to the passengers. It has been handed down that this accident had much effect on Pascal's life; that for ever afterwards he was obsessed by the vision of a chasm which opened at his feet; but for this tale

there would seem no foundation, and the thing has too suave a note of sensational conventionality to show sign of truth. Indeed, the matter is only mentioned once, and that on no sure authority, and is chiefly useful to show that it was Pascal's custom to ride abroad with the appointments of nobility.

So, in dignified company, and it may be presumed with no lack of material comforts, he passed these years. The cause which had made him change from the close-prisoned ascetic to the man who took his part and pleasure in the things about him, was not hard to see; improved health and natural inclination can make insistent call, so that even the deafest shall come to recognise their voice. Yet, after a year or two of this more vigorous life, he seems to have found his interest waning, and that which he had been before attracting him again.

His health weakened somewhat; his short convalescence began to close, and of this he was doubtless aware, feeling that constant pain would again come to him. Yet he was stronger than before his father's death, and was not cut off from all movement and activity.

Not long after the accident at Neuilly, at the time when he was no longer strange to that which then formed his daily life, the last change in his behaviour began to show itself. His visits to Port Royal began to be frequent ; the anxious Jacqueline might again hope that the attraction of the world was passing from him ; and M. de Roannez and his sister doubtless found that he spoke more of religion than had lately been his wont. And this tendency grew stronger, so that before long he was constant in his attendance at Port Royal, and had begun anew to decry as vain those things which had made his pleasure. Nothing, moreover, would content him but that his friends shared the change in his views, and to this end he was urgent in persuading Monsieur and Mademoiselle de Roannez that their former doings were of an unworthy nature. Upon this subject his eloquence must have been of a conclusive nature, or the affection in which this couple held him gave a weight of import to his simplest words, for he led them complaisant to the end that he desired, teaching them, as he had taught Jacqueline, that a life of solitude and prayer was alone that which should bring them any lasting joy.

It happened this second time in the same manner as the first. When Pascal set about him to turn those he held in high esteem to the path that he called good, the task was undertaken with something of secrecy. The young Duc de Roannez was a man of the highest station, if of no abundant fortune ; his sister had her place in the nobility of France, and might be expected to make a marriage of some importance, although her dowry should be small. It was not at all to be supposed that two such persons should refuse marriage, nor would their refusal bring other than the keenest indignation against him who had so persuaded them. Therefore, when M. le Comte d'Harcourt, great-uncle of de Roannez, had after some difficulty arranged a marriage between his grand-nephew and a Mlle. de Menus, a girl of good family and of much wealth to whom de Roannez had paid his court, and when he was met with the announcement that the marriage could not be, since the bridegroom would have none of it but was set upon retirement from the world, consternation and a considerable outburst of anger was aroused in the family. The Comte d'Harcourt, a man, it appears, of a choleric habit and with no soft trick

of mincing words, spoke his mind freely. His nephew was a fool, said he, a fool of the worst quality. Here, after prolonged effort, was come the thing that he desired. He had followed Mlle. de Menus with attentions, had announced to the family his desire for this union, and now that she, the richest heiress in the kingdom, had willingly agreed to the bargain, the young fool must say he did not fancy marriage. And we may suppose the Comte d'Harcourt, dwelling on this folly, invoked Heaven to witness that things were not so when he was young. De Roannez, something timid, put off the final word of his decision, but after a fortnight's vacillation, during which time he sought encouragement and support from Pascal, he made the declaration that he would have nothing to do with the alliance. Thereupon his great-uncle fell, not without reason, into a fury, abused his nephew with a deal of feeling, and swore that Pascal was at the bottom of all the trouble and that he should suffer for it.

It so happened that Pascal was lodged at this time in the Hôtel de Roannez, so that he was not far to seek. With the end, therefore, of meeting justice to such uncalled-for interference, a servant,

poignard in hand, mounted early next morning to his room, there to settle the whole business. But the habits of austerity may sometimes stand a man in good stead, and though the hour was early, Pascal was abroad, and being warned, did not return to face so violent an opposition.

It may be conjectured that though a man of fiery temper, the Comte d'Harcourt was no lover of assassination, for there is no record that Pascal was further molested, or that any attempt was made to find him at his own house. Yet surely the indignation against him was great, and not unjustly called into being ; for a little while before he had taken much part in the ordinary amusements of the time, had expressed no hatred for them, had even made mention that he had it in mind to seek employment and a wife. And if a man show himself one day in one part, and the next is convicted of persuading others against his own way of living, he cannot, though his reasons carry full weight in his own mind, hope that others will see justice or any measure of fairness in that which he has done.

It was towards the end of 1653 that Pascal began to show signs that he inclined again towards

austerity ; and during the year following he acted as a man who balances two weights, yet cannot decide which has the greater value. He still moved in the world, at the same time seeing much of those who denounced it as a vain and wicked place. In December of 1654 his decision was made, and that in favour of a solitary and austere life. A letter of Jacqueline to Gilberte, dated 8th December 1654, announces her brother's action with much complacency. "Il n'est pas raisonnable," she writes, "que vous ignoriez plus longtemps ce que Dieu opère dans la personne qui nous est si chère. . . . Tout ce que je vous puis dire n'ayant pas de temps, c'est qu'il est par la miséricorde de Dieu dans un grand désir d'être tout à lui, sans néanmoins qu'il ait encore déterminé dans quel genre de vie ; et qu'encore qu'il ait depuis plus d'un an un grand mépris du monde et un dégoût presque insupportable de toutes les personnes qui en sont, ce qui le devait porter selon son humeur bouillante à de grands excès, il use néanmoins en cela d'une modération qui me fait tout à fait bien espérer. . . .

"Quoi qu'il se trouve plus mal qu'il n'ait fait depuis longtemps, cela ne l'éloigne nullement de

son entreprise, ce qui montre que ses raisons d'autrefois n'étaient que des prétextes."

If Jacqueline gives here a true presentation of the facts, and there is no reason to suppose that she does not, three points seem evident: that Pascal's health had become worse; that he had been sometime in doubt about his conduct; and that even when he was resolute to turn his back upon society, he had no sure plan of his future actions. Something had so affected him as to arouse his disgust at ordinary enjoyments; yet he did not immediately spurn these things, but continued for some months, at least, distrusting that which he had and not knowing what was better.

There is an account of his final alliance with Port Royal which runs well upon conventional lines, nearly akin in detail to the revivalist conversion. It would seem that Pascal had been very frequent in his visits to Jacqueline, and that in their conversations he had shown an inclination to warmer sympathy with the monastic view, yet always he would hesitate at the decision and was irresolute in his plan of life. However, he turned slowly to a love of solitude and meditation, and

was with each visit more inclined to accept the urgent advice of his sister and her teachers ; so that one day, when he was more than ever inclined to change his way of living, he sat long in talk with Jacqueline, and on leaving her went to the sermon of M. Singlin in the chapel of Port Royal. This sermon was upon the vanity of human pleasures, and the plain duty that was man's to abandon such things and to seek only the salvation of his soul in the way the preacher named. The end of the story is obvious and need scarcely be told—the sinner was converted, and left the chapel freed from his love for the world. Although, taken in such fashion, this tale is credible only to those who deal in such conversions, it yet has some mark of truth and is at least the account of a certain episode in Pascal's life. M. Singlin was a man of eloquence, and it is very possible that something that he said on that occasion was the confirmation of much that his hearer wished to accept as true. A man may well be fearful of adopting a conclusion, yet lose something of his fear when he sees another confident where he is doubtful.

That Pascal did soon after the hearing of this

sermon turn from his former amusements and retread the ascetic's path, is a fact about which there is no doubt ; that he was suddenly brought to this attitude by the exhortations to which he listened, cannot justly be believed ; but that he was grateful to M. Singlin, and because of what he said took a decision with more of confidence, is surely the right reading of the story.

After his submission to Port Royal, and his reception there in guise of a penitent, he expressed a determination to withdraw into the country, that he might the more easily escape the questions and arguments of his acquaintances. De Roannez heard of this project with displeasure, since even a temporary separation from Pascal was very bitter to him. The plans, however, were not to be foregone because of the call of friendship, and the new penitent departed with a M. Laines to the latter's country house.

Pascal's temper was at this time of an exacting nature, for the quiet of a friend's house was not such as he could stand ; so that before long he was back at Paris, and found quarters at Port Royal, where, unmolested, he enjoyed complete solitude. It was during the short time that Pascal

was housed within the Institution itself that he first met M. Saci, and that he took part in that famous conversation about Epictetus and Montaigne, the record of which is left.

While he was thus in an absolute retreat his friends were uninformed of his movements, and there was no little speculation as to what he had done. That he had embraced in some fashion an austere religious life, seems to have been commonly assumed.

After this interlude of retirement Pascal again appeared outside monastic walls, and took up his dwelling in an ordinary house ; but it was now his avowed intention to devote himself exclusively to the service of religion, and to busy himself with works of charity. There is, indeed, a difference, which can by no means escape notice, between the austerity of his early manhood and the habits of the last years of his life. In the former period he seemed content with meditation and with assistance at religious rites ; in the latter, though often completely incapacitated by sickness, he seeks an active championship of his religion and is not content with simple devotions, but would busy himself with the practices of his belief.

He appeared possessed by much unrest, and was not satisfied with even the entirety of his own abandonment. Neither was he anxious that his new position should be spoken of, seeming not sure of where he stood. On this point Jacqueline writes to Gilberte in a letter dated 25th January 1655: "Je l'ai toujours vu jusqu'ici dans une si grande crainte qu'on sut rien de tout cela que je n'avais pas même osé lui proposer de vous en rien mander. Enfin, je lui en écrivis quelques jours avant son retour: il me répondit que si on lui ordonnait de le faire il le ferait, mais que par lui-même il ne s'y pouvait résoudre parce que il se voyait si peu avancé qu'il ne savait du tout que vous dire. . . ."

The teaching of the Jansenists was becoming at this time a matter for much discussion, and was already the subject of attacks. The Jesuits showed themselves allied against Port Royal and its preachers. On the 31st January 1655 the curé of St. Sulpice—a M. Picolé—refused absolution to the Duc de Liancourt, saying that such could not be given to one who shared the Jansenist views. Upon this the friends of the sect were greatly put about, and immediately occupied themselves with

championing their doctrines. On 10th July 1655, Arnauld published the *Lettre à un duc et pair de France*, designed to show that the conduct of the curé of St. Sulpice was such as the circumstances in no way justified. This letter was the subject of a prolonged discussion amongst the doctors of the Sorbonne, and was finally condemned. Shortly following this condemnation, which included the author in his work, Arnauld and some friends, amongst whom was Pascal, discussed together the prospects of the Jansenists. It was agreed that to make no effort at defence, and simply to receive this condemnation with resignation, by no means became men persuaded of their just cause. Arnauld therefore sat down and wrote a letter which should be by way of justification, and this he read to the assembled company. But the attempt met with no enthusiastic reception, and was, indeed, pronounced unfitting for its purpose. At this decision Arnauld turned to Pascal and, saying that he was both young and enthusiastic in the cause, asked him to attempt the defence. This Pascal undertook to do, and the following day read the first *Provinciale* to the company. So at the outset of his return to religious devotion he found occupa-

tion of a practical kind, and was for the next fourteen months engaged in an attack upon the Jesuits.

The publication of the *Provinciales* caused no little excitement ; the attack on casuistry was so well directed that the Jesuits saw themselves seriously harmed, and the public, who were not perhaps greatly interested in the discussion, were yet curious to know the author and discover the person of this Louis de Montalte whose style displayed so much of brilliance. During the preparation of these letters, and while the discussion of his writings was yet fresh in society, Pascal should have enjoyed a pleasurable excitement. The absorption of action was his ; he was engaged in that which furthered the cause at his heart, and which brought him into danger of imprisonment should anything be done carelessly. For the authorities were much concerned with the discovery of the author and of the printer, and to that end pushed their inquiries with zeal. Suspicion fell upon one Pierre Lepetit, printer to the King, but his house was searched with no result. The telling of this incident had surely formed a most distracting interlude in the life of those con-

cerned ; for Pierre Lepetit was in truth the printer of the *Provinciales*, and struck off the copies by night in a mill between the Pont Neuf and the Pont au Change. And when the officers of the King interviewed him and made known their intention of searching the house, his wife was staggering to the lodging of a neighbour with the heavy blocks, set up for the impression of the second letter, hidden beneath her apron. Rumour named Pascal as the possible author, and though the report went unconfirmed, he felt it necessary to exhibit all the precaution of a man who is watched. He moved his lodging from the Porte St Michel, and settled at the sign of the Roi David, a little inn in the Rue Poirées, behind the Sorbonne, and fairly in face of the Jesuit College. Here he was known as M. de Mons, and here M. Perier came to stay with him. It so happened that a cousin of M. Perier, a Jesuit priest, called at the inn to warn his kinsman of the rumour that Pascal was the author of the letters. M. Perier put what face he might upon the matter, standing in great anxiety with his back to the bed, the curtains of which were scarcely drawn together, so that to anyone who had glanced that

way there would appear set out upon the counterpane the newly printed copies, not yet dry, of the latest *Provinciale*. The priest was, however, a man of no great observation, and the authorship of the attack upon his order went undiscovered.

In such circumstances, with so much to be done and so much to be avoided in his life, Pascal might well escape any too melancholy meditation.

In spite of his withdrawal from the entertainments and amusements of society, and in face of the anger which he had caused at the Hôtel, Pascal still influenced De Roannez and his sister to no inconsiderable extent. As with the brother, he persuaded the sister against marriage ; and so, at the time when the *Provinciales* were being published, Mlle. de Roannez shut her ears to all talk of a husband and retired to the solitude of Port Royal. The fury of her family at this second miscarriage of their plans was, it may be presumed, boundless ; yet no threats and no persuasion would move the girl from her avowed intention. But her mother would not accept this latest reverse, and since her daughter would not come willingly from her retreat, set about finding the means to compel her ; and for this purpose

obtained a *lettre de cachet*, and, so armed, demanded the person of her daughter from the superior of Port Royal ; and having regained the control of her child, bore her, we may suppose, complaining, to the quiet of the country, where she should have ample leisure to adopt her parents' view. It was to this retreat in the country that Pascal sent those letters which are still preserved, and which show beyond question that he held Mlle. de Roannez in very deep affection.

The *Provinciales* being finished, and there being no intimate friend in Paris who might be persuaded to the religious life, Pascal suffered a want of employment. Mathematics no longer held his attention, since he saw in them too much that savoured of the world ; so with the next years he got farther from a normal conduct, and engaged himself more strictly in the performance of many austerities.

CHAPTER VII

To those who see either use or sense in a continual mortification, to whom the denial of luxuries and of all that makes for human joy is something fit for admiration, the end of Pascal's life should afford very pleasant reading. Yet to others more sanely constituted there should be here a very real pathos ; not that the man who practised these austerities was unhappy in the act—he was, indeed, persuaded of his wisdom—but that, engaged on his own business, he used his talent and his genius rather to the end of self-satisfaction than to the profit of other men.

One principle guided him in all his actions : “renoncer à tout plaisir et à toutes superfluités” ; and this renunciation so obsessed him that every other consideration was reduced before it. The story of his last years may be quickly told ; it is no happy nor inspiring narrative.

In the matter of the furnishing of his apartment he denied himself all comfort. We may suppose that he was surrounded with articles that were plain and strong, and which were not more numerous than necessity demanded ; we know that among such things he considered a carpet should find no place. He made his bed and cleaned his room himself, fetched his dinner from the kitchen, and would have none of domestic service, except in those matters which he was unable to accomplish unaided ; since he was an invalid and required a careful diet, cooking, it is presumable, was amongst these. Before long he came to dispense with a broom, deeming it superfluous, and fell, it would seem, into a habit of great untidiness. Upon this point Jacqueline reproves him in a letter which speaks directly and with great good sense upon the point. “On m’a congratulée,” says she, “pour la grande ferveur qui vous élève si fort au dessus de toutes les manières communes, que vous mettez les balais au rang des meubles superflus. . . . Il est nécessaire que vous soyez, au moins durant quelques mois aussi propre que vous êtes sale, afin qu’on voie que vous réussissez aussi bien dans l’humble diligence et

vigilance sur la personne qui vous sert que dans l'humble négligence de ce qui vous touche ; et après cela, il vous sera glorieux et édifiant aux autres, de vous voir dans l'ordure, s'il est vrai toutefois que ce soit le plus parfait, dont je doute beaucoup parce que saint Bernard n'était pas de ce sentiment."

It is not stated whether Pascal took back a broom among his household equipment, convinced by this letter in which a matter of cleanliness is referred to the opinion of a saint.

Under such circumstances it is no matter for surprise that his health grew worse, and that so rapidly that he was shortly deprived of all activity, and in continual pain. Even in such conditions, without comfort and without the energy that may come of activity, he managed to put forth some work. During a sleepless night, when toothache was added to his other sufferings, his mind dwelt upon his forsaken mathematics, busying itself with problems half forgotten ; and since even this ascetic found no fault in such employment of a wakeful night, he set himself to question the matter of the roulette, upon which he had come to a conclusion before dawn. This conclusion, which he

afterwards published, was his last mathematical accomplishment.

At odd times during these years he would attempt to gather material for his great defence of Christianity, and to this end he would make notes on such paper as might be to hand, setting down his thoughts at hazard and locking up the papers unnumbered and unarranged. So that in the *Pensées*, which are the collection of these notes, there appears little of the defence of his religion and much of the revelation of the man ; for it is not the skeleton of the book that has come down to us, but the thoughts of the author upon the subject that he should one day write upon.

And this was all his occupation ; this setting down of his thoughts, and the performing of acts of charity. His spare time was spent in attendance at religious services or in serious discussion with his friends ; pleasure, or any relaxation such as is shared by ordinary men, he sternly avoided.

He was not a rich man, yet he would spend much that the poor about him might be relieved ; and, that no one who had need of help might go unaided from his door, he would borrow money at interest and so have something to give. He

worked with energy to start the first public omnibuses in Paris, not only that he saw good might be done by the establishment of such conveyances, but that the enterprise should bring him money which might be distributed among the needy. Yet his charity was very possibly ill-judged ; it has the appearance of being performed because Pascal saw in it his duty, and not because those to whom he extended his bounty were very sore in need. This is well illustrated in the matter of his view of public charities, for which he had no liking. He regarded with considerable doubt hospitals, and institutions where the aged who had fallen upon evil days might find housing and a supply of food. They inclined, such was his plea, to lessen the responsibility of individual charity, so that a man might send money to such an establishment and think himself quit of further charitable action, and in this he would be wrong. It seems that the object which caused him to be charitable was not the good of those whom he assisted, but the benefit that he might gain from conduct which he considered most became him. Thus he would borrow money, spend all that which he had, and busily occupy himself with

the means of getting more, that the act which he considered right might be the more frequent.

The tale is told of how, coming one day from a service at St Sulpice, he met a young girl in the street seeming in much distress ; questioned her and was told a tale of poverty, and ill-treatment, and present destitution ; and thereupon befriended her, and that apparently without further inquiry into the truth of the tale which had been told him. If his charity was commonly of such a nature, it is scarcely possible that there were not many rogues living in comfort on account of his goodwill. Persuaded that giving help to poverty was a most Christian virtue, he freely gave it that he might himself be virtuous, not seeing—or the account of his acts goes sadly wrong—that, since the business must affect both sides, he did grave wrong in paying small heed to the receiver.

Of his own conversation and of the words of those who talked with him he was very strictly particular. He could by no means endure a discussion about food in his presence, saying that for himself he never noticed that which was put before him, and ate only because he must, and

that he could see nothing but a waste of time in a subject of so little importance.

He was put into a great state of annoyance in that Gilberte spoke to him of a certain woman who, she said, was beautiful. This, he maintained, should never be stated when a servant or a person of other than middle age was present ; for the young, or those who had not been taught to set strict watch upon their thoughts, should not be encouraged to set any store by the beauty of the body. Again, the unfortunate Gilberte incurred his displeasure by reason that she, after a custom not altogether uncommon, would caress her children ; he seeing in this something fruitful of no good.

Yet it was not only in the conversation of others that he found that which was amiss. In his own he saw a constant reason for anxiety. It was his habit to grow much excited in talk, and he not uncommonly found himself taking pleasure in the superiority of his arguments over those of other men. Dissatisfied at such behaviour, which he could by no means overcome, he devised a method that should bring to his mind, at such times as his excitement mastered him, the humble

spirit of his desire. He wore beneath his clothes an iron belt furnished with sharp spikes upon the inside, so that when excited in the heat of argument he should feel its presence, and, being at once reminded of the humility which he had forgotten, improve the lesson by the pressure of his elbow.

The fourth day of October 1661, there died at Port Royal, Jacqueline Pascal, Sœur Euphémie, youngest child of Etienne Pascal. It is certain that she had been very dear to Blaise, that she had shared his ambition and his sorrows, had been the partner of many of his emotions, and that, though at her entry to Port Royal the two had sundered their close comradeship, the brother and sister were again in close sympathy at the moment of her death; yet Pascal received the news with calmness, and exhibited no sign of sorrow. "Dieu nous fasse," he is reported to have said, "la grâce d'aussi bien mourir!" And with that he added no word of sorrow, nor would he permit that others mourned this loss in his presence. Gilberte, more sensible of the loss than he, showed signs of her sorrow, and this he could not stand. It was not a fitting thing, he said, that the death of the righteous should be mourned, since in death they

gained what they would have. The manifestation of an attachment, he considered, was something that should not exist among men. If a fellow being were held in deep affection, the opportunities to render kindness and service might easily be found, but for the demonstration of any attachment otherwise than by the performance of acts of goodwill, there should be no place. And this principle he faithfully carried into practice, not caring that it might be misunderstood and cause sorrow to those who loved him. “*Dieu nous fasse la grâce d’aussi bien mourir !*” Yet, though we wish to face death with calmness and high courage, the thought of such an end can bring no solace for the death of a close friend. If we hear that someone who is near to us is dead, someone who in our daily life and in our memories played a long rôle, it is not our own death that we must think upon, but the years that shall go by without the lost companion.

In such fashion, denying himself all comfort, all pleasure, and the show of all affection, Pascal passed to the finish of his life. He showed a great simplicity in all his actions, and was ready with a prompt obedience to his confessor. He could not

tolerate opposition to a duly constituted authority, and maintained that, in politics or in religion, such revolt must inevitably be wrong. For four years previous to his death he was in continual ill-health and not seldom confined to bed. When he was in a position to go from the house, he would attend all the daily offices of the Church, and when he could no longer go abroad, he performed long devotions within his room.

In June 1662 his condition became alarmingly worse, and did not again improve, though the doctors denied, maintaining their point until the last day of his life, that there was any cause for alarm. In this state he was nursed by Mme. Perier, who, with her husband, then lived in Paris. One of the household being attacked with small-pox, it was considered impossible that the nurse should continue her offices unless the infection were removed. Pascal, however, would not tolerate that another should be moved on his account, and so himself went to live with his sister.

There we may suppose him tended with every care, although it was his custom to dispense with all services as far as his strength would permit. When, indeed, it became no longer possible that

he should serve himself, he expressed his trouble at receiving that which was denied to so many, and asked that some sick man might be found who should share the nursing that he had. This Mme. Perier not improperly refused to do. Thereupon Pascal asked that he might be taken to the hospital for incurables, and so at least suffer the same treatment as the poor he was no longer permitted to help. His request was again very naturally refused. Thus, much of his last illness was taken up with asking others to perform those acts of charity which he could himself no longer undertake, and with a continual regret that when he had health, he had not more busily employed his time.

In August 1662 the doctors were still confident that the patient was in no danger, and continued their same treatment. Nothing, however, would persuade Pascal that his death was not near, and upon this assumption he sent for a priest, confessed, and asked that the communion might be administered. His friends, hearing of this, came to the house in great anxiety, imagining that his death was imminent. In order that he might save their feelings, and since he could not convince

others of that which he felt himself, he did not again communicate, though, it is said, he confessed daily. In such fashion some days passed, and then, throwing aside all thought for others, he begged that the last rites of the Church might be administered, since death was upon him. The doctors, discovering no change, would not admit that there was any need for so extreme an action, and dissuaded M. and Mme. Perier from asking the aid of a priest. So matters stood in the evening of the 18th of August. At midnight Pascal was seized with a violent convulsion, upon the passing of which those about the bedside thought him dead. He again recovered consciousness, and was administered the communion, which he had so urgently asked. At one o'clock in the morning of 19th August 1662 he died, being in his fortieth year.

CHAPTER VIII

THE hour of death, if it does not come upon a man unawares or rob him of a due command of thought and speech, seldom shows him in any new or unaccustomed light. Death-bed sentences, if truly reported, confirm most commonly the pose of life. Thus Charles II. in dying put a fitting finish to his life, and Napoleon in his last words showed that military glory held the largest place in his thoughts. Shakespeare made Falstaff babble of green fields and call upon the name of God, a fashion that had not been his wont in health ; yet since he was seen to “fumble with the sheets and play with flowers,” we may suppose that he wandered in his senses, and came back to the thoughts that had weighed with him when “he cried out of sack” and named women “devils incarnate.” For if a man has any reason for his actions, and follows a way of life on which he has

spent some thought, he will not be unwilling to set the seal upon it with his last breath, so that those who stand about him, and those who hear the report of what he said in dying, may know him unflinching in his attitude and resolute to fly his life's flag on the unknown voyage of death.

So Pascal, when he came to die, was firm in that pose which had marked his life for many years, and, giving no place to thoughts of mathematics or of human affection, made an austere and pious end. Such a finish proclaimed the importance in which he held this conduct, but does little either to soften or make more courageous so lamentable a death.

A conviction of immortality is likely the most comforting belief that any man may hold ; yet the assurance that sometimes accompanies it, suggesting an eternity of pain for those who have not obeyed certain rules in life, is a supposition so awful, so pregnant of a criminal and brutal lunacy, that those who adopt it must go about their business with miserable and darkened vision. Either they must suppose themselves condemned to an unending torture, in which case they will be tempted to do little that their lives may be either manly or noble ; or, seeing others engaged

upon very other ideals to themselves, they will imagine these men and not themselves condemned to this perpetual punishment, and, if they are capable of any pity, will find their whole lives poisoned by the contemplation of so much irreparable tragedy about them.

The lives of men who hold this damnable doctrine are commonly, and surely wisely, since they are convinced in so fearful a belief, of a like pattern. They are wholly engaged in the business of saving themselves from this lasting damnation ; a false step, and they see themselves for ever suffering in a perfected torture-house. They worship a God whom they name a being of mysterious ways, and of whose commands they are but imperfectly instructed, believing only that disobedience to his will must bring them hopeless punishment. By the strangest exercise of their imagination, they call this God the incarnation of Love and Pity, but are nevertheless content to avow him capable of actions so callous and brutal that before them the worst of men's offences become kind and generous in their seeming. Many men and women, to whom the infliction of pain or the miscarriage of human justice is a

source of deep sorrow, have been, and are still, it would seem, content to carry with them the burden of this oppressive creed. Their lives must be ordered and governed that they may not offend the caprice of this imagined God, who, having equipped his puppets with a defective vision, will forever condemn them to great agony because they cannot clearly see.

In proportion to the earnestness of his belief, the holder of this doctrine of damnation cuts himself off from the most of the joys that are about him. Instructed that his nature is evil, and that to obey its inclinations would call upon him the wrath of God, he is continually concerned with escaping the contact of evil ; dare not mix freely with those about him ; and finally comes to a complete want of sympathy with any but his own narrow view, fearful that the discussion of another might bring him temptation, even possibly defile him. He is like a man who, setting out for a day's walk, is wholly concerned with getting to his night's lodging. To turn aside and stray where his fancy tells him will of necessity take him from the straight road ; but the night will come wherever he finds himself, and, if he walks

steadily and does not idle too much by the roadside, he will not unlikely find some shelter in which to sleep, and, moreover, carry with him, when he lies down, some memory of what the country off the road was like.

To proclaim that all men who show themselves enthusiastic in the practices of Christianity are moved by this fear of post-mortal punishment, would be to announce oneself very foolishly ignorant on a point of fact. The most part of Christians, it may be assumed, have some nobler ideal and are engaged in some more positive endeavour. Yet, though they may not be tainted by so base and horrible a belief, they are yet firm in the assumption that the nature of man is evil, and that in following his inclinations he will do wrong ; that right and goodness are not in the nature of men ; and that to escape sin a man must separate himself from human ideals. The Christian, be he a believer in hell or be he of a saner mind, must go outside of man and his affairs when he contemplates beauty and truth ; the ideal for him is not in life but after death.

Pascal, from the time that he turned his back upon the world, showed himself absorbed in the

contemplation of man's immortality, and that with such growing devotion that death came upon him completely deaf to the call of human happenings. The finish of his life has much of that appearance of pious devotion which goes not uncommonly with a weak mind, afraid, or incapable, of looking outside its narrow boundaries, busying itself with the reiteration of devotional performances in the hope of finding peace. Yet to such an attitude the whole life of Pascal gives the lie. His was a mind imaginative and inquiring, which knew no rest and sought always some certainty. To read the story of his life and see how, from the years of childhood, he had groped his way in paths where he was unguided and alone, and so to proclaim that he set aside in later years this habit of investigation which had so singularly marked him in boyhood, is surely a suggestion that flies in the face of probability, and has need of much sound proof. And if there be those who, having read the *Pensées*, are still sure in their conviction that at his death he was untroubled in the matter of religion, and content to go where others led him, they are certainly convinced through other agency than that of his life and writings.

Yet there is in his biography a very changing story, so that his last years would seem to turn upon his youth, and show him changed in all his views. The case for a sudden devotional awakening and a penitent horror of a worldly life is rich in circumstantial evidence ; but by its very nature, and the supposition that it makes of a sudden change of character, open to a grave suspicion, and, upon a close examination, little liable to convince its most fervent well-wisher. It is, indeed, more likely and supported by a surer evidence that the whole story of his life is of a piece, that there comes into it no sudden and alarming change of view, and that the young mathematician, spurred by a confident enthusiasm, is a man sharing the same ideals and seeking the same goal as the suffering ascetic coming to his death in lonely piety.

His father had been intent to foster in his child the spirit of inquiry, and the habit of weighing carefully an explanation. The inclination of Pascal had found satisfaction in such a practice, so that he was early accustomed to seek the reason of all that passed about him. In such a manner there would be strengthened in him a love of truth ; and he would soon regard a definite or true state-

ment as a thing that should be come upon at all costs, and which alone should provide the basis of human action. The way was clear and shown beyond the chance of error, if man was resolute to seek the truth alone : such was not improbably the tendency of his boyish speculations. It so happened that in his first serious occupation, in his precocious entry to the study of mathematics, he was upon a ground that would assure him further in this conviction. The experience of his first labours was that in those things which seemed without explanation reason might be found, if it were sought with care.

His boyhood was extraordinary and set in a more serious surrounding than is common, removed, it would seem, from the influence of the arts and shadowed by a grave scholarship. Etienne Pascal was, outside of his business, something absorbed in the society of learned men ; and of this society his son became early a member. In such gatherings the talk would likely turn upon matters of fact, or questions in which evidence would not be lacking ; the passions and their important part in life, the nature of beauty and its influence on men, would seldom come into

discussion. Pascal became, therefore, a youth of very serious mind, endowed with a strong sense of duty, and happy in an occupation which engrossed him. The influence of his early life brought him the conviction that truth and error might be easily distinguished, and that actions and motives might be placed in two orders, those true and right being separated in the simplest fashion from such as were false and wrong. Two things became necessary to him and to his wellbeing : a clear view of his actions, and a goal to which he might aspire. And these two things he had in his command, and was not unmindful of their importance.

It is probable that he was very fully occupied, and so escaped much speculation of a random nature, and since he did not encounter many men who were of an unlike habit, both of mind and occupation, to himself, he was seldom forced to question the conduct of others or to inquire too closely into his own.

When the family came to live at Rouen, Pascal was introduced to a larger acquaintance, and came to see more of the lives of those about him. It was impossible that at that date and in that city he should have continued his secluded and studious

existence, hearing no rumour of the events which went on around him. The troubled state of the town and of all Normandy would give him much food for speculation, and supply him with the example of many persons, each honest and whole-hearted after his fashion, striving for very different ends, and each maintaining, not without some title of justness, that the object which he sought, and which was the opposite to that of his neighbour, was to him the true ideal of right. Etienne Pascal, who, there is much reason to believe, was a very honest man, yet met with much opposition, and was decried and probably slandered by those who did not love the King's officers. Blaise Pascal would hear something of this criticism, though it is likely he was spared the worst of that which was said ; he would in any case see that there were those who thought the taxes unjustly imposed and too heavy, and that the collectors and officers of the revenue, although themselves men of scrupulous habit, were to be held in suspicion, since they were engaged on so doubtful a business. It is unlikely that Pascal would share in any manner this point of view, but, since he was a man of quick intelligence, he probably saw that such opinions

might honestly be held ; and so came to wonder that there should be no more constant standard by which actions might be judged. Seeing the definition of right something differently accepted, he would become uncertain of his own standpoint, and possibly, during the years he spent at Rouen, felt doubt as to the strength of his own position. He accepted, however, a standard by which he could judge this difficult question, and which it had not yet occurred to him to examine with any closeness. In the religion which was accepted by most of those about him without a suggestion of there being in it the possibility of error, he could find a code which should resolve by its authority any problem that might disturb him. At the foundation of this religion was the doctrine of the fall of man, which taught that in his present state man was debase and gifted with an evil nature, which, if he acted through the compulsion of his own inclinations, would lead him to do wrong ; that there was a benevolent power governing the world, whose commands had been in part revealed to men ; and that by the suppression of his own desires, and by submission to these commands, man should arrive at just action, and fit himself

for an immortality of happiness. The world was not shown as either just or happy ; it was not argued that in men's affairs there was any clear path of right ; with great boldness it was urged that neither true happiness nor justice could exist where man alone was concerned, and that, in view of this, human life should be regarded as a necessary probation in which preparation should be made for the true life after death.

In this aspect of Christianity Pascal could find an explanation for his difficulties. All that was contradictory and obscure might be attributed to man's inability to see clearly, and to his efforts to find in his own instincts some satisfying line of conduct. Suffering and injustice became things of no vast moment, since they might be held temporary and impossible in the after life. To a man who ardently desired to see his way to a clear and solid goal, who was newly entered upon the difficulties of existence after the shelter of studious quiet, and who saw the brightness of life obscured by physical pain, such a belief would offer great attraction. It is, indeed, probable that at this period of his life Pascal considered no other, but accepted this as true in the unquestioning

spirit of faith. Circumstances had combined to give this attainment of perfect happiness and truth a greater prominence in his eyes than would have been the case if his life had run a smoother way. For a time he allowed the influence of his own desires and the words of his friends to shape his life, making no effort to examine his position ; and since he felt no doubt of its soundness, we may suppose him happy and content. But Pascal was not of those men who can rest long in a still contentment, who, seeing a prospect which holds their fancy, will seek no other, nor even search for a better aspect of that which they already see ; his inclination was to assure himself that no blemish lay in the scene before him, and to that end he must move about and see from every side.

So after a very brief hesitation he set about exploring the land which lay before him, and became, it would seem, displeased with the way that he followed. Too great a contempt for man and his endeavour he conceived as foolish, and in the heat of the reaction set his back upon the road, which runs a straight course to death, as to a pleasant city on a hilltop, and turned to take his part in life.

In the years which followed his father's death, it is probable that Pascal tasted at least something of the joys of life ; and, having tasted, he surely carried the flavour with him to the end. He mixed in a society that had many interests ; he was the close friend of a man of noble birth, and had some acquaintance with wits and men who favoured a certain cynicism. He had met and travelled with the Chevalier de Méré, and it is likely that he knew other men of the same stamp. There is reason to suppose that he took part, and not unwillingly, in fashionable amusement, and during this period of experiment was at least fully occupied. We may assume, moreover, that he brought into this part of his life that same enthusiasm and eagerness to understand, which had marked his boyhood and his youth. In these years he was nearer to the sight of other men than he had been before, or was to come again ; and in them he gained what knowledge he ever had of the mixed nature of that which men look for, and that which they have, of happiness. In this short time he learned more than in all his life before, and when at the end he made his choice, and went back again to solitude and a steadfast

anticipation of immortality, he was no longer ignorant and with no experience, but a man who had sought something and failed in finding it.

One experience he had which not unlikely outweighed the rest of that which he had found ; for amongst the lightness of amusements he was surprised in a deep passion, and felt the power and the unreasoning emotion of strong love. Mlle. de Roannez was, it would seem, the woman who inspired this passion, and by the thoughts which she induced in him, he likely came to a different conception of the worth of human existence. For a man cannot suffer the full tide of elemental passion, feel himself absorbed in his existence of the moment, so that he is careless of what may be in the distant future, and then acknowledge that in this life there is nothing but a sad probation in which no depth or greatness is.

In the *Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour* Pascal has left the record of the strong emotion which held him, and has shown that when he sat down to this writing there was little of the despairing ascetic in him, much rather of a man not ill content with things about him. He does not appear blinded with an overmastering sentiment ;

there is no frenzy in his words, as in the *Prière pour le bon usage des Maladies*, but throughout there rings a happy note of confidence, such as may come from a man assured of that which gives him joy. "L'homme est né pour penser ;"—thus he begins the *Discours*—"aussi n'est il pas un moment sans le faire ; mais les pensées pures qui le rendraient heureux s'il pouvait toujours les soutenir le fatiguent et l'abattent. C'est une vie unie à laquelle il ne peut s'accommoder ; il lui faut du remuement et de l'action, c'est-à-dire qu'il est nécessaire qu'il soit quelquefois agité des passions dont il sent dans son cœur des sources si vives et si profondes."

In this first statement of his case he would pay the highest tribute to pure thought, naming it an essential quality and of the essence of man's being ; but he would have it understood that the human mind is not so made that it can simply content itself with so high an occupation. In our life there must come, he urges, something of excitement and the stress of passion, which shall not result from successful or deep thought, but shall be the outcome of instinctive emotion.

‘Qu'une vie est heureuse quand elle commence

par l'amour et qu'elle finit par l'ambition ! Si j'avais à en choisir une, je prendrais celle-là. Tant que l'on a du feu, l'on est aimable ; mais ce feu s'éteint, il se perd : alors que la place est belle et grande pour l'ambition ! La vie tumultueuse est agréable aux grands esprits, mais ceux qui sont médiocres n'y ont aucun plaisir ; ils sont machines partout. C'est pourquoi l'amour et l'ambition commençant et finissant la vie, on est dans l'état le plus heureux dont la nature est capable."

A very glutton of emotion ! He would have the excitement and interest of love in youth, and in maturer years find the stimulus of ambition to chase away monotony or petty care. A man fashioning such a programme is not possibly at war with life.

With a fine contempt he would throw aside all question of whether love should be, urging that it is natural, is inevitable, and should, therefore, be accepted.

"L'on demande s'il faut aimer ? Cela ne se doit pas demander, on le doit sentir. L'on ne délibère point là-dessus, l'on y'est porté et l'on a le plaisir de se tromper quand on consulte."

Gaining enthusiasm in his subject, he is content

with no less a declaration than that a life without love is impossible.

“ Nous naissons avec un caractère d’amour dans nos cœurs, qui se développe à mesure que l’esprit se perfectionne et qui nous porte à aimer ce qui nous paraît beau sans que l’on nous ait jamais dit ce que c’est. Qui doute après cela si nous sommes au monde pour autre chose que pour aimer ? En effet, on a beau se cacher, l’on aime toujours. Dans les choses même où il semble que l’on ait séparé l’amour, il s’y trouve secrètement et en cachette et il n’est pas possible que l’homme puisse vivre un moment sans cela.”

Continuing in his definition of this affair of love, he maintains that man can only feel love for that which is beautiful, and since man himself is the most beautiful of creatures, he will feel love for his own kind ; the man for woman and the woman for man, the difference in sex making each see the other in a more attractive fashion.

Each individual, says Pascal, will have his own ideal of beauty, and that he will seek to find. “ Néanmoins,” he continues, “ les femmes déterminent souvent cet original. Comme elles ont un empire absolu sur l’esprit des hommes, elles y dé-

peignent ou les parties des beautés qu'elles ont ou celles qu'elles estiment et elles ajoutent par ce moyen ce qui leur plaît à cette beauté radicale."

His experience of women had at least given Pascal a just idea of their power ; he would assign them a complete empire over the minds of men, and would not have it thought that this statement was made in any spirit of exaggeration, for he would give to many the faculty of pleasing.

"Si une femme veut plaire et qu'elle possède les avantages de la beauté ou du moins une partie, elle y réussira ; et même, si les hommes y prenaient tant soit peu garde, quoiqu'elle n'y tâchât point, elle s'en ferait aimer. Il y a une place d'attente dans leur cœur ; elle s'y logerait."

Forgetting, it would seem, any other attitude, carried away by the strength of his conviction, and certain of the nature of the pleasure he describes, he makes no hesitating declaration. "L'homme," he cries, "est né pour le plaisir ; il le sent ; il n'en faut point d'autre preuve. Il suit donc sa raison en se donnant au plaisir. Mais bien souvent il sent la passion dans son cœur sans savoir pour où elle a commencé."

The flood of his assurance had surely run

strongly when Pascal thus named his views ; there is no trace of any doubt, but the strongest tone of certainty. To be convinced, that is enough, and a full proof in itself : the argument quiets all critics, cutting the ground from their feet. Yet a man so guided may easily find himself carried to excess, and will not unlikely suffer the most startling changes in his outlook. Of this Pascal seemed aware ; for, following on the assumption that pleasure was the aim of man, he set down this statement : “ *Un plaisir vrai ou faux peut remplir également l'esprit. Car qu'importe que ce plaisir soit faux, pourvu que l'on soit persuadé qu'il est vrai ?* ”

At least he does not refuse to see the possibility of that which he champions. A man, following such a doctrine, may have grave doubts that the pleasure in which he indulges is all that it should be, yet feeling that he can experience no other to which the same doubts shall not apply, he continues without change, knowing that he will not forego all pleasure for fear that he may not find the right. He who can see this is come to some knowledge of himself and other men ; and if, in recognising it, he makes no outcry and does

not lament such placid acceptance of uncertainty, he, though something dulled to the finer prick of idealism, is well equipped to make good use of all that may occur. To seek nothing but the perfect is to pass by that which is only good.

Having written upon the general subject of love, Pascal touches a question somewhat more personal, and sets down his opinion of the affection of those whose condition and station are not equal.

“L’homme seul est quelque chose d’imparfait ; il faut qu’il trouve un second pour être heureux. Il le cherche bien souvent dans l’égalité de la condition, à cause que la liberté et que l’occasion de se manifester s’y rencontrent plus aisément. Néanmoins l’on va quelquefois bien au dessus, et l’on sent le feu s’agrandir quoiqu’on n’ose pas le dire à celle qui l’a causé.

“Quand on aime une dame sans égalité de condition, l’ambition peut accompagner le commencement de l’amour ; mais en peu de temps il devient le maître. C’est un tyran qui ne souffre point de compagnon ; il veut être seul ; il faut que toutes les passions ployent et lui obéissent.

“Une haute amitié remplit bien mieux qu’une

commune et égale le cœur de l'homme ; et les petites choses flottent dans sa capacité ; il n'y a que les grandes qui s'y arrêtent et qui y demeurent."

Although the difficulties of such an attachment are evident to Pascal, in spite of the necessity for silence and restraint which he recognises, he is induced to admire the case and would have it in some sort the ideal. Passing over this matter without other comment, he seeks a fuller definition of the joy of love, is careful to describe how it may be fostered, how wit should enter into it, and to what extent the man of ability is qualified to take a larger share. He gathers fire in writing, and paints the happiness of a man in love with the brightest colours at his command. Although the affair be somewhat one-sided, he who pays court shall find his compensation in the feelings which are born in him.

"Les yeux s'allument et s'éteignent dans un même moment, et quoique l'on ne voie pas manifestement que celle qui cause tout ce désordre y prenne garde, l'on a néanmoins la satisfaction de sentir tous ces remuements pour une personne qui le mérite si bien. L'on voudrait avoir cent langues pour le faire connaître ; car comme l'on

ne peut pas se servir de la parole, l'on est obligé de se réduire a l'éloquence d'action."

It is assuredly no feeble attachment that Pascal here describes, but a fine frenzy of passion in which the philosopher might have been surprised upon his knees, with rolling eyes and languishing glance. It may be assumed that, if the "eloquence of action" were in proportion to the ninety-nine tongues which he wished to have but had not, the lady whom he wooed, though manifesting no answering sign, had scarcely failed to take his meaning.

"Mais," argues Pascal, "quand il" (the abstract lover) "est dans l'état que je viens de décrire il n'y peut pas longtemps à cause qu'étant seul acteur dans une passion où il en faut nécessairement deux, il est difficile qu'il n'épuise bientôt tous les mouvements dont il est agité."

But, he asserts, the smallest sign of any answering sentiment will give back the full attraction of the quest. All that men commonly feel and have felt in the matter he would seem to have experienced; and all is set down with a great faithfulness. He writes of how the lover will feel himself a man completely changed, and will go in

continual fear that his condition is plainly visible to all who meet him ; and of how he is certain that with his new-found knowledge he can discover a like state in others ; and of how some love cannot vanquish difficulties, and some will gather strength in adversity. There is often in the *Discours* that which is very far from an originality, but there is always the impression of a genuine conviction.

The light love that comes and goes, and is ardent, but for the moment only, is not that of which Pascal writes. To him the matter is of a more serious nature, and may not lightly come to being.

“ Le premier effet de l’amour c’est d’inspirer un grand respect ; l’on a de la vénération pour ce que l’on aime. Il est bien juste : on ne reconnaît rien au monde de grand comme cela.”

And again, following the same idea :

“ L’égarement à aimer en divers endroits est aussi monstrueux que l’injustice dans l’esprit.”

It is a condition in which the mind is engaged more fully than the body that inspires Pascal to these declarations ; that attraction which is physical alone is passed unnoticed in his reckoning. Excess there must be in such a business, but—and this is

a point to which he continually comes back—the whole matter is ruled by a deep passion, and is one of the chief things in life. In this spirit he sees love govern with a strong hand, brooking no rival.

“Je suis de l’avis de celui qui disait que dans l’amour on oubliait sa fortune, ses parents et ses amis : les grandes amitiés vont jusques-là. Ce qui fait que l’on va si loin dans l’amour c’est que l’on ne songe pas que l’on a besoin d’autre chose que de ce que l’on aime : l’esprit est plein ; il n’y a plus de place pour le soin ni pour l’inquiétude. La passion ne peut pas être sans excès ; de là vient qu’on ne se soucie plus de ce que dit le monde, que l’on sait déjà ne devoir pas condamner notre conduite puisqu’elle vient de la raison. Il y a une plénitude de passion, il ne peut pas y avoir un commencement de réflexion.”

He would then show in what circumstances love may best thrive, and finds that a life of changing events will be the best.

“Les âmes propres à l’amour demandent une vie d’action qui éclate en événements nouveaux. Comme le dedans est mouvement, il faut aussi que le dehors le soit, et cette manière de vivre est un merveilleux acheminement à la passion.”

Pursuing the same thought, he maintains that the bourgeois is not as well placed for the development of this passion of love as the man of courts, since the latter will not suffer the restraint of a staid and uneventful life. But he would not have it supposed that man's object should be to wear his heart upon his sleeve, or to search for love as he might seek his food. "Les grandes âmes ne sont pas celles qui aiment le plus souvent ; c'est d'un amour violent que je parle : il faut une inondation de passion pour les ébranler et pour les remplir." The affair, he seems to urge, will be more serious and more compelling in proportion to the strength of character of the man.

At the end of the *Discours*, when he has set forth his views on the nature of this passion, Pascal gives some description of the feelings of the lover : how he is fearful to hazard the decision of his mistress, seeing the stake is of such magnitude ; how he cannot support absence, yet in the presence of the woman who holds his love he suffers and is ill at ease. There would seem in this description the note of personal experience.

The man who wrote this Discourse on the Passion of Love was beyond all doubt acquainted

with his subject, and that in no casual manner. He had felt the stirring of a great emotion, had inquired into it, and had seen it very important, and very strong. Seeking no explanation of what it was, or the causes that brought it into being, he was content that it should be, and saw in its existence something that gave a greater worth to life. Conscious of a power that could so enchant him and his surroundings that they appeared in new and unknown guises, gave him strange interests and unaccustomed fears, and brought him to a fuller joy of all his efforts, he was happy that this thing should be, and proclaimed it inseparable from human nature. Since he had seen and known in this fashion, he at least held something of the true meaning of that which keeps men faithful to living in the midst of so much pain ; and though he lost the sensation of the passion, fell upon duller days, and was disappointed of his ardent hopes, he could never be where he had stood before he found this knowledge, but must, in the years that came to him, carry a dearer memory and a finer estimate of human worth.

So, with open eyes and no little satisfaction, Pascal came to the experience of love. For

perhaps two years he was hopeful and despairing in his suit, as is the wont of lovers ; yet from the first he had surely known that no happy domesticity should come of his affection. There can be little doubt that the woman who provided Pascal with the matter for the writing of the *Discours* was Mlle. de Roannez. It is a strange and most improbable assumption that he was on intimate terms with many women, or was in any sort a squire of dames ; but, or the record of his life goes widely wrong, and the letters that he wrote were insincere, he did share with this lady that acquaintance which goes farther and demands more than friendship. He was a constant visitor in the house in which she lived, was there received on the footing of a well-trying friend, and did certainly see much of the daughter of the house. She respected him, and thought much of his opinion, and was eager to act upon the suggestions that he made ; for when he had been turned from the house in anger, and was no longer admitted to her circle, she would do nothing but that which he advised, and was, in spite of the opposition of her parents, intent upon retreating from the world, since in such a course he held she would be wise.

The facts as they are known have surely one clear meaning : Pascal, when living after the manner of other men, enjoying their amusements and sharing their hopes and ambitions, was seized with the love of a lady his superior in birth and in position. The chance of his life was such that he was thrown into a close intimacy, and that in the most natural manner, with this Mlle. de Roannez, who was the sister of his surest friend. In such circumstances he enjoyed for a time the happiness that was within his easy grasp, not caring that some day he must pay the full cost of his pleasure. It is, indeed, probable that he saw that his reckoning would be heavy, but was so transported by the strength of his passion that he put all such cause of hesitation from him, judging the moment of greater value than any future quietude—his writing upon love should show him not lightly impressed with its commands. There would, however, come a day when he must face a choice : either Mlle. de Roannez for the first time showed a return of his affection, or he knew himself no longer capable to check his feelings, and must take all or put a stop to any meetings. Since she was not unwilling to forego the world, it would

seem likely that the pair were frank in their affection, and saw no other course but separation, or an illicit union. That Blaise Pascal, a mathematician of some fame, yet of no fortune nor any birth, should marry with a Roannez was a thing impossible, and not to be come upon in any honest manner.

So, we may suppose, there was a meeting, the last that they might have ; the interchange of vows and the swearing of fidelity ; and a parting that was final and the separation of their ways. Pascal, with his costly knowledge of human affections, was again alone to find his object and his goal. And, setting out with little hope and a great store of memories, he walked with a heavier burden, and, probably, felt weary on the road.

CHAPTER IX

It is not possible to fix a date in Pascal's life which may appear the limit of his worldly pleasure, and after which he may be shown to abandon all social amusement and ambition, busying himself only with religious matters. It was in no way in the nature of the man to give himself to any sudden change, or upon the spur of some emotion to throw himself with ardour into a strange way of life. The outstanding feature of his character, which helped him to much unhappiness and the most of his achievement, was that he could hardly persuade himself to any action for which he had not the quiet assurance of deliberate judgment. Whatever he might do was based upon a firm foundation, his honest conception of right ; so that he was very greatly hampered in his movements, and in his acts was much constricted, since it was his habit to set aside the chance of doing

good if the manner in which he must act should seem doubtful. All his writings show him in one continual endeavour, the search of truth ; and this thing was without doubt the main object of his life.

He fell in love, and set himself to analyse his feelings, seeking the justification of such a state, or, in default, the proof that he did no wrong to suffer such emotions. He convinced himself that in this matter of love there was no evil, and so became enthusiastic to study and experience it, revelling in an emotion with such potentialities for joy. In the *Discours sur les Passions de l'Amour* there is a note of happiness which does not only come from the contemplation and the experience of amatory pleasures, but which is the rejoicing of a man who has found a new light upon his world ; it is the song of one newly unchained from reason, delighting in his freedom.

When Pascal, content in his emancipation, and seeing, it is surely just to think, golden visions of the future, wrote on the subject of a profound and unexplained emotion : “L'on demande s'il faut aimer ? Cela ne se doit pas demander, on le doit sentir,” he was come to an understanding that could not lightly affect his life, and which was no passing

or unreckoned attitude. He made no attempt to explain this love, to search out the cause of it and set it in a place prepared ; yet he maintained that it should be. So he was come where reason must ever lead a man : to the acknowledgment that there are many forces working in his nature of which he has no comprehension, and that they make demands from him of so imperious a kind that without any hesitation he will pronounce them just, and of the essence of his being. For if a desire be only strong enough, we make no question about it, but see it as inevitable, and part of that which we were born to feel.

This acceptance of the commands of strong emotion his love had given to Pascal, and from this acceptance he never wavered, but was faithful and held to it for the remainder of his life. Yet the whole outward aspect of his existence changed ; he set himself apart from his fellows, and practised an austere religion ; he held material prosperity of small worth, and professed a pleasure in pain and the mortification of his body ; but in comfort or in asceticism, amongst men or in solitude, he was encouraged by the same principle, “Cela ne se doit pas demander, on le doit sentir.”

When it became finally evident to Pascal that his intimacy with Mlle. de Roannez must cease, he had been a man without the capacity of acute feeling—and this he was not—if he had not been much cast down. It is probable that for the moment he was thrown into complete despair, and considered existence not able to offer him any further happiness, or even the bare pretence of comfort; yet, the first bitterness of his trouble passed, he would come to a more philosophic consideration, and would not regret that he had felt the pulsing of such vigorous life. Indeed, he would seem to have had thoughts of attempting the renewal of his happiness, and, though he could not have things as he wished them, of discovering a compromise that might in some sort supply his wants; for, it is said, he thought of buying a charge and seeking a wife. Since it is manifestly impossible that he had any serious idea of a union with Mlle. de Roannez, we may suppose this announcement about his thoughts of marriage must refer to some other union that he contemplated, thinking a wedded life might bring pleasure and interests for the experience of which, even though they should fall

short of those which he had pictured, he was very much minded. This intention he did not carry out, though the idea does not seem unnatural and has the appearance of an honest attempt to make the best of what there was to hand. After a period in which he appears in perplexity and indecision, during which this affair of settled employment and marriage occurred doubtless as one of many schemes, he took a decision, and, acting upon it with a considerable enthusiasm, finished his days a seeming prey to hysterical religious mania. It is in this indecision and the conclusion which resulted from it that lie the great interest of Pascal's life, and the explanation of the motive which ruled his actions and his thoughts.

Of the time immediately preceding his retreat from the world, before he set about the defence of Jansenism and the confounding of the Jesuits, there is little information. A few letters, many of them filled with the anxieties of Jacqueline on his account, and all of them together supplying the slightest information, these are the basis of the slender narrative. Yet on one point they seem positive: they name Pascal much worried and irresolute. From the character that had shown

itself in earlier years, from the troubles that he had passed through, and from the thoughts that he has left on record, it should not be impossible to find some explanation of the difficulty in which he found himself.

Moving among other men, Pascal had most certainly taken note of his surroundings. It is not likely that he was blind to the presence of many problems of sociology to which he could find no solution. He would constantly catch sight of happenings which puzzled him, which were in opposition to his conception of right, and which warred with the strict interpretation of his religious teaching. He could not fail to notice that there were men about him living lives that on his own classification should be called bad, who defied the principles which he held sacred, and made no shame of conduct which he condemned, and who, nevertheless, moved among those about them, doing good and spreading happiness, and who were often themselves courageous and noble citizens ; that, on the other hand, men of his own way of thinking, who preferred the highest principles and only acted upon conscience, might fail entirely to be of any comfort to their fellows,

but must pass through life meaning much good and seeking to do it, continually fearful that they did not do enough for others and eager to sacrifice their own comfort, yet finding neither love, nor respect, nor the testimony of others that their lives had been of any value. He would know himself intent to find the truth and fearful to move where he could not see the way, yet would meet many who in the midst of dire perplexity walked in the dark, stumbled not uncommonly on noble actions, and, guided by instinct and with no other aid, made as good a business of their lives as he did, and with vastly more of comfort to themselves. Such things would give him matter for reflection, and supply the basis of much unanswered questioning.

It is a useless and unwarrantable task to suggest what the thoughts of any man might have been, even if his character be clearly known; but if some record of his life is left, if the account of his actions is at all coherent, more especially if he has left some writing behind him—for the writer, if he be honest, must set his character on paper that the world may read—the business of saying that most assuredly he did not refuse to think on

certain matters is not arbitrary or unjustified. For if in his words and his writings a man has proclaimed himself a keen investigator of all that comes beneath his notice, it is no wild assumption to assert that in the most important matter that ever held his attention he was likely to have expended no less than his usual care. In the *Pensées*, which are his final thoughts upon religion, Pascal has shown that the subject was one very constantly in his mind; it would seem unreasonable to suppose that he came to his conclusions in any haphazard fashion, or that in a matter that so nearly touched him he showed a conscious carelessness.

The construction of religious beliefs, their development, their prosperity, and their fall are coincident with the history and progress of man. In all countries and in all ages religions have been known and have been practised; as far as we have knowledge of the past, we see our predecessors engaged in the adoration of some ideal, and maintaining that therein lies the explanation and the government of nature. The worship changes, and the object of it is seen in different ways, but the idea is constant, and has remained and likely will

do so. The thought that he is born into a world without order, where for a short time he must struggle in the hands of chance, blindly and in the face of very heavy odds, and then, his brief hour ended, cease and be no more, is a very intolerable burden to man. There is in him something which leads him to respect that which he names right ; what this thing may be he does not know, but to distinguish it is of a piece with that same instinct which tells him to seek it. Together with this craving for the thing that he calls right, he is obsessed by an idea that there must be some state, either present or to come, in which right shall be master, and since he feels that the appreciation of this thing is in some sort in him, he imagines that he will have part in such a state. The whole matter is vague and takes no definite shape in his imagination, but forms the basis of his thoughts and is vital to his life. In view of this instinct which is so universal and so imperious, he is engaged in an endeavour to know more nearly what he is and what this ideal of his may be ; and to this end he has, and does, set up many explanations, each of a different kind, yet all upon a common basis. He is dissatisfied with his own condi-

tion, seeing in it too many limitations, and wishing, yet not able, to journey on so that the horizon shall retreat before him. He cannot escape from the conviction that there is a more distant land than any he can see ; and his reason tells him that in this land there must be life and movement different to that which he knows, since the farther he journeys in his own country the wider and stranger becomes his view. Finding the burden of this instinct and this uncertainty a very irksome thing, he has imagined an explanation, or has accepted for his use the imagination of others ; and in this explanation he has spared neither pains nor care, making it the best and most beautiful that his mind can devise. And since the bulk of men change their opinions slowly, the same suggestions have served in the same quarter of the world for many generations, there being added from time to time some point that is considered worthy. So that after centuries of acceptation the explanation is revered, is codified, and is made the form by which those who hold it true shall rule their lives. It becomes disputed and vigorously championed, and has its followers who will suffer in its defence the loss of their goods and of their lives, and who,

convinced that their explanation is the most beautiful, and therefore, by the instinct that is in all men, nearest to the ideal right, will bring their teaching before other people holding other views, and seek to persuade them to accept it. So these religions, these collections of men's hopes and ideas on an unknown subject, are spread, and always have been, throughout the world, doing much service to men. Buddhism, Christianity, and the creed of Mahomet, with many others that claim fewer followers, are each held by those faithful to them to contain the true statement of the nature and destiny of man.

In all religions, though their teaching be widely different, there is one common attribute : they can offer no proof of what they uphold which shall convince a man, as he is convinced of pain when he puts his hand into the fire. Their strength does not lie in indisputable evidence, but, disregarding the process of man's reasoning and appealing to his instincts, rests in a conviction that is stronger than any assembling of facts. So that a religion is always weakest when seeking to establish itself upon a show of evidence, and entering the ground of common debate, and seeking to strengthen

its position by the production of ordinary and mundane proofs, is seen at a great disadvantage. For if a man is not attracted to a certain religion and has no sentiment of its beauty and its truth, he will be but slightly affected by the arguments which its teachers may produce ; if, on the other hand, he has for it that emotion which is called faith, which by aid of no external motives, but from a strong inclination that is in his mind, leads him to believe that this thing is true, then, if he has an honest courage and is not afraid to state that in certain matters he is prepared to cast aside the services of reason—which, whether he avows it or not, he does daily in a hundred matters—he will, in the face of all opposition, but that of his own feelings, profess the religion which so calls him. While he has this conviction, he is so strongly placed that nothing can dislodge him, but without it he cannot maintain his position by other means. If he is moved to question the belief which he has hitherto held without dispute, he will act on account of one of two reasons : either he is dissatisfied with some aspect of the creed, in which case he will likely find some compromise which shall bring back again his old content ; or he is no

longer in sympathy with the ideal which served him before, and he must find some other conception to supply his want, or spend his time in unsuccessful search. The matter of faith is not at all within his control ; there is no single process by which the deeper emotions may be certainly induced. Joy and ecstasy, hope and belief can be fostered, but they may not be summoned at the moment they are needed ; like other possessions of a rare value, they are much sought for, but not possessed by all. Without this emotion of faith, though he earnestly wish it, a man may not have part in a religion ; with it, he cannot be dispossessed from his holding.

Pascal, ardently desiring some clear rule by which he might govern his life, disappointed in his hopes of marriage and suffering in body, was forced to contemplate the attitude which he had held and abandoned, and in which his sister, who was in some sort his pupil, had persisted without faltering. It is improbable that he ever wavered from his admiration and respect for the doctrines of Christianity, but it would appear very evident that at the end of the year which he spent in the recreations of society he was very seriously

concerned with the justification of that faith. He had gained some acquaintance with the many difficulties of life, and had formed no high opinion of the power of man's reason ; he had suffered much disappointment, and was disillusioned of many of his hopes ; so that he was more than ever attracted to a teaching which made earthly sorrow light by promise of eternal recompense. Yet, since he was honest and sought the truth rather than contentment, we may suppose him fearful to accept this creed until he had persuaded himself that he no longer leant on a delusion which should pass as the other hopes that he had held.

The autumn of the year 1654 found him convinced that he did well to hold to his religion, confident of his way, and again assured in the life that he should lead. On the night of Monday the 23rd of November he was finally settled in a decision, and in a document which bears the mark of a profound emotion, he has testified the fact.

The paper, which he was afterwards careful to carry on his person, and which was found sewn in his clothing when he came to die, is thus expressed :—

L'an de grâce 1654.

Lundi 23 Novembre, jour de St Clément, pape et martyr, et autres au martyrologe.

Veille de St Chrysogone, martyr et autres.

Depuis environ dix heures et demie du soir jusques environ minuit et demi.

Feu.

Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob,
Non des philosophes et des savants.

Certitude. Certitude. Sentiment. Joie. Paix.

Dieu de Jésus-Christ.

Deum meum et Deum vestrum.

Ton Dieu sera mon Dieu. . . .

Oubli du monde et de tout hormis Dieu.

Il ne se trouve que par les voies enseignées dans
l'Évangile.

Grandeur de l'âme humaine.

Père juste, le monde ne t'a point connu, mais je t'ai
connu.

Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie.

Je m'en suis séparé

Dereliquerunt me fontem acquæ vivæ

Mon Dieu me quitterez-vous? . . .

Que je n'en sois pas séparé éternellement.

.

Cette est la vie éternelle qu'ils te connaissent seul vrai
Dieu et celui que tu as envoyé J.-C.

Jésus-Christ. . . .

Jésus-Christ. . . .

Je m'en suis séparé ; je l'ai fui, renoncé, crucifié.

Que je n'en sois jamais séparé.

Il ne se conserve que par les voies enseignées dans l'Évangile.

Renonciation totale et douce.

Etc.

To read this writing would seem almost to be prying into the private correspondence of a man without his leave, to be seeing that which was never intended for our eyes. This, indeed, is not improbably the case. Pascal wrote this thing for his satisfaction only, and kept it that he might hold some record of an important moment in his life. When he was taken with his mortal illness, the whole matter would have seemingly escaped his notice, so that after his death a servant found secreted in his clothing that which he would likely have destroyed, but which is now read and made the subject of much comment.

The meaning of this writing is but lightly sketched, but since it was for the writer's use alone, there was no need for great elaboration. Although the expression is not full, the emotion which inspired the record is not hard to find. There can be no doubt that Pascal had come to a decision, and was convinced that he saw truth.

Certainty, joy, peace, that is the burden of his cry ; the ending of doubt, and the establishment of a belief. He now held the religion of Christ as true, and was content and happy in his faith, seeing in it alone the proper subject for endeavour and for union.

So that it can be affirmed with certainty that in the year 1654 Pascal held, with the faithfulness of the believer, to the creed in which he had been bred. And had his writings finished then, and was there nothing more to know about his life, it would be impossible to name him other than a man happy in the enjoyment of a beautiful belief ; but he afterwards set down his thoughts upon religion, in the hope that he might some day shape them to a form that would aid others to find comfort in the views he held. It is in these thoughts that the man is shown, not as the faithful follower who was never uncertain in his allegiance, but as one much troubled whether his faith was given in a just cause, to whom the greatest happiness had come when he had assured himself that his subjection was to truth.

From his boyhood there was before Pascal a definite goal, and in the service of one chief en-

deavour he spent his life, sacrificing his bodily and his mental comfort that he might obtain that which he so earnestly desired. He would find truth. And truth was to him something precise and definite, in the light of which all human happenings showed sharp and well-defined, and before which all confusion or obscurity should flee. His mind had had its training in a subject where conclusions might be named right or wrong, and where evidence was not lacking, though perhaps hard to find ; and when he came to concern himself with the conduct of men and its justification, he was unwilling to allow that the same rules should not apply, and that a line could not be drawn dividing the just from the unjust and the good from the bad. He was in arms against a philosophy which should teach that to lie and murder might, in certain circumstances, be nobler than to state the truth and to save life ; that the rules of life and honour were made that they might sometimes be justly broken ; and that faithful service, which does not heed the servant, but only the cause served, might be held to render a man blameless though convicted of many crimes ; that the game of life is very difficult and intricate, so that no man yet

has been master of the moves, and he who plays with energy and courage in an honest endeavour to perform his best, may be said to play well, not perfectly, for the perfect player is not yet known, nor even with any great or subtle skill, but well ; and that to play well is no mean accomplishment. These things he could not see, but opposed them, believing that life hid some true standard of good which might be found if the search were pursued with sufficient zeal. Feeling in himself an admiration for that which he termed beautiful and right, and maintaining with, it would seem, a deep justness that this was the highest instinct of his nature, he claimed that obedience to this instinct lay in a certain form of conduct, and would not admit that two men performing opposite acts, yet moved by the same motive, which should be to carry out their ideal of right, are both of them of an equal virtue, and both associated in the same cause.

He sought some code by which he might govern his life, and by reference to which any action could be styled right or wrong ; any teaching that maintained, as a chief principle, the importance of motives, and professed ignorance as to the exact nature of certain acts, appeared to him as an un-

worthy compromise. He was satisfied that the standard of right which was his guide had little to do with any human origin, but was sprung from some source more perfect than the mind of man might conceive, and was, therefore, not subject to the alterations of ordinary conveniences, but was a thing apart, unconnected with mortal considerations. And this principle, which he held most firmly in his later years, and which in fact inspired him to the composition of the *Provinciales*, had guided him in earlier life, and had led him to accomplish much of what he had done. Casuistry was to him an entirely misleading and useless study, since in his seeing the efforts of man should be directed not to finding reasons and excuses for his conduct, nor to discussing and adopting an ethical standpoint, but to seeking a government which should not rest upon his own ideas, and in which he should do nothing but obey. So that the attitude of those persons, professing a belief in some guidance which was given to them through the medium of their emotions, by some power which was not human, who were nevertheless concerned with accommodating this emotional guidance to their human requirements, was very

abhorrent to him, arousing in his mind considerable indignation. And this thing was his chief point of quarrel with the Jesuits ; they professed their subservience to a divine rule, and were yet intent to alter that rule that it might be more acceptable to men. “ Les Jésuites ont voulu joindre Dieu au monde et n’ont gagné que le mépris de Dieu et du monde.”

It was the boast of the Jesuits that they adapted the form of Christianity to the needs of the time ; and with such an object Pascal was in bitter opposition, so that in the *Provinciales* he holds this point up to ridicule. “ Les Pères étaient bons pour la morale de leur temps,” he makes the Jesuit father say ; “ mais ils sont trop éloignés pour celle du nôtre. Ce ne sont plus eux qui la règlent, ce sont les nouveaux casuistes.” And again he puts into the mouth of the same speaker : “ Nous laissons les Pères, à ceux qui traitent la positive ; mais pour nous, qui gouvernons les consciences, nous les lisons peu, et ne citons dans nos écrits que les nouveaux casuistes.”

In a later letter he returns to the same charge, making the Jesuit father again praise the adaptability of the Society’s teaching.

“Helas ! me dit le père, notre principal but aurait été de n'établir point d'autres maximes que celles de l'Évangile dans toute leur sévérité ; et l'on voit assez par le règlement de nos mœurs que si nous souffrons quelque relâchement dans les autres c'est plutôt par condescendance que par dessein. Nous y sommes forcés. Les hommes sont aujourd'hui tellement corrompus, que, ne pouvant les faire venir à nous, il faut bien que nous allions à eux ; autrement ils nous quitteraient : ils feraient pis, ils s'abandonneraient entièrement. Et c'est pour les retenir que nos casuistes ont considéré les vices auxquels on est le plus porté dans toutes les conditions, afin d'établir des maximes si douces, sans toutefois blesser la vérité, qu'on serait de difficile composition si l'on n'en était content ; car le dessein capital que notre société a pris pour le bien de la religion est de ne rebuter qui que ce soit, pour ne pas désespérer le monde.”

This attitude Pascal would never acknowledge as well based. It was a compromise with truth, and therefore, in his view, could lead to no good. That many might be attracted to a less rigid code than that which was held to be the right one, was

a consideration which did not lure him to any endeavour. The truth was the essential thing, and all that was not entirely truth was false; that which was much true and a little doubtful, the uncertain being dressed in different fashions, so that many different characters might find themselves attracted to the whole, must be considered as corrupt, since it fell from the ideal standard.

“Les casuistes,” he writes, “soumettant la décision à la raison corrompue et le choix des décisions à la volouté corrompue, afin que tout ce qu’il y a de corrompu dans la nature de l’homme ait part à sa conduite.”

Such methods could not serve a pure ideal; and if the ideal were not to be served purely and with a single aim, wherein, he seems to suggest, lay the object of serving it at all? If the matter were not held an affair of certainty, in which the explanation of man’s nature and his purpose in the world were shown clearly; if any doubt or choice of conduct were allowed in the faith at all, the whole fabric would be undermined, and the belief become little better than a suggestion.

“Mais est-il probable que la probabilité assure?” This was the most vital of his objections to the

methods of the Society of Jesus. They based the teaching of Christianity on an interpretation of its probable meaning, and so removed from it the rigid aspect of revelation. And Pascal, seeking a creed which should supply him with a full and true guidance, was furious that this should be denied in the one that he had chosen. He wished to be kept upon a certain road ; not encouraged to walk anywhere, so that he walked.

CHAPTER X

IN the unordered thoughts which Pascal put on paper, and which were to have formed the basis of the chief work of his life, there is a clear, and, we may suppose, true record of the process of his mind, so that, seeking to throw more light on a subject which to all men is of great importance and to most very obscure, he named the way he took himself and showed how he came to a decision, convincing himself not in spite of but by reason of so much doubt. For he was too honest a man to deceive himself in the matter of ethics, or to refuse to allow that he was faced with many perplexities. Yet he was wholly set upon one thing, which was to find some way out from the mire of confusion which hung about him ; and, keeping this aim steadily in front of him and weighing carefully what evidence he had, he found a position in which he was happy, from which he

could not be dislodged by criticism, and to which he had come only when he was assured that, being seated there, he would not need to close his eyes to convince himself that the place was strong.

The problem of the origin and destiny of man, and of his importance and powers of discerning his own position, is in its nature such as shall possess the human race continually with an absorbing interest. The inquiry into these things engaged Pascal very closely, so that he was amazed to find that there were men who troubled themselves very slightly in the matter. "Rien," he writes, "*n'est si important a l'homme que son état ; rien ne lui est si redoutable que l'éternité.*" And about indifference to this great question : "*C'est une chose monstrueuse de voir dans un même cœur et en même temps cette sensibilité pour les moindres choses et cette étrange insensibilité pour les plus grandes.*"

But he was aware of another aspect in the business, and was not disinclined to lay stress upon it. Leisure and the uninterrupted opportunity for thought are, he maintained, discomfortable possessions. And so in the question of the employment of men he is against too much

idleness. "Ainsi on leur donne des charges et des affaires qui les font tracasser dès la pointe du jour. Voilà, direz-vous, une étrange manière de les rendre heureux. Que pourrait-on faire de mieux pour les rendre malheureux ? Comment ! ce qu'on pourrait faire ? Il ne faudrait que leur ôter tous ces soins : car alors ils se verraient, ils penseraient à ce qu'ils sont, d'où ils viennent, où ils vont ; et ainsi on ne peut trop les occuper et les détourner ; et c'est pourquoi après leur avoir tant préparé d'affaires, s'ils ont quelque temps de relâche, on leur conseille de l'employer à se divertir, à jouer et à s'occuper toujours tout entiers." It is curious, he continues, that this readiness to undergo fatigue and the annoyance of hard and dull work should be so common. Yet the alternative is not gladly accepted, and much is suffered that unanswerable thoughts may be escaped. "De là vient que les hommes aiment tant le bruit et le remuement ; de là vient que la prison est un supplice si horrible ; de là vient que le plaisir de la solitude est une chose si incompréhensible."

Pascal could well see, and had most probably felt, that in the case of most men this attempt to

find distraction, and to fly from thought, was the wisest and most comfortable employment with which they might occupy themselves ; for himself, he could not adopt such treatment, since every diversion to which he had given himself had failed to hold his attention for more than a short period. He would gladly have adopted such a method of finding happiness, had the matter lain within his governance, but he was impotent to find in amusements, and the ordinary occupations, the thing which he desired. “ Mais n’est ce pas être heureux que de pouvoir être rejoui par le divertissement ? Non, car il vient d’ailleurs et de dehors et ainsi il est dépendant et partant sujet à être troublé par mille accidents qui font les afflictions inévitables.” There is a weak point in all amusement that comes from external causes, so to a man who is very strictly concerned with finding some sure means of pleasure, and therefore the more critical in his choice of what may lead to this end, that which satisfies his companions shall leave him unmoved.

Yet quiet with no employment may induce the most melancholy and disturbing thoughts. It is surely no forced vision that sees in his description

of this condition a personal remembrance, that finds Pascal crying out against something that had often hurt him. "Rien n'est si insupportable à l'homme que d'être dans un plein repos, sans passion, sans affaire, sans divertissement, sans application. Il sent alors son néant, son abandon, son insuffisance, sa dépendance, son impuissance, son vide. Incontinent il sortira du fonds de son âme l'ennui, la noirceur, la tristesse, le chagrin, le dépit, le désespoir."

If he had had no experience of the bitterness of certain thoughts, Pascal would not have written in this strain ; he would, perhaps, have drawn repose as something unworthy and which should not come to the man of active mind, but he would scarcely paint it that dark thing he does, making it a horror from which all escape is good. He had passed what is, in the common phrase, named a life of leisure ; his time had been at his own command, and his work was such as pleased himself ; he had, moreover, been much upon a sick-bed ; so that he was not unacquainted with repose, that state in which the mind chooses its own course, and is set to no definite effort. In repose and in employment he was alike aware of the perplexity and

uncertainty that is life, and found therein the reason for continual troubling. "Ainsi s'écoule toute la vie," he writes. "On cherche le repos en combattant quelques obstacles; et si on les a surmoutés, le repos devient insupportable." For in such strange fashion is man made that he sets his heart on obtaining something which, when he has gained it, appears no longer to be desired. Of this Pascal was fully convinced, and on more than one occasion had been moved to make a note of it, finding as an explanation that it is the effort to get what he desires, the joy of the fight, which brings pleasure to man. "Rien," he would have it, "ne nous plaît que le combat, mais non par la victoire. On aime à voir les combats des animaux, non le vainqueur acharné sur le vaincu. Que voulait-on voir, sinon la fin de la victoire? Et dès qu'elle arrive, on en est soûl. Ainsi dans le jeu, ainsi dans la recherche de la vérité. On aime à voir dans les disputes le combat des opinions; mais de contempler la vérité trouvée, point du tout. Pour la faire remarquer avec plaisir, il faut la faire voir naître de la dispute."

It is evident that man will undergo much hard treatment and suffer and give many blows to

arrive at an object that he would possess ; yet it is rather the proving of his superiority, and the furtherance of the attitude which he champions, that attracts him ; the attainment of his object is an action that gives him little pleasure.

And in the nature of the things which man desires, and for which he strives, Pascal found no less cause for astonishment than in his constant need of some end to which he might push his way. In all his efforts man is little concerned with the present, but occupies himself with defence or thoughts of the past, and, most of all, with plans and hopes for the future. "Que chacun examine ses pensées, il les trouvera toujours occupées au passé et à l'avenir. Nous ne pensons presque point au présent ; et si nous y pensons, ce n'est que pour en prendre la lumière pour disposer de l'avenir. Le présent n'est jamais notre fin ; le passé et le présent sont nos moyens ; le seul avenir est notre fin. Ainsi nous ne vivons jamais, mais nous espérons de vivre ; et nous disposant toujours à être heureux, il est inévitable que nous le soyons jamais."

Here is a characteristic of human nature that requires some explanation, seeming without cause,

yet true, and one which was deeply impressed on Pascal's mind. It is evident that this absorption and interest in the future is a matter that varies much with different men ; one being content with what is immediately about him, taking things as they come, and careful to extract all the pleasure that he may find in them ; another mightily concerned with an ideal, hopeful doubtless that he shall some day realise it, yet aware that in the happenings of his own life that hope is not fulfilled. So that it may be said that he who is in search of something good or great, who builds a fine picture of life and is optimistic of human worth and human ability, will set his thoughts faithfully upon the future, that he may not be discouraged in the present ; and that only he whose ambition is neither for any wide nor yet any spotless happiness can much concern himself with present things. And since Pascal was filled with very magnificent hopes, and looked for a state in which there should be no imperfections, he, as all men must in some degree, imagined others as thinking somewhat after his own fashion, and denied to all much interest in the present. It is, indeed, probable that the same desires and

aspirations are common to the kind, and that all the human species are linked by the same passions, which affect a very similar expression, though arrayed in different coloured clothing. Yet in many there are passions which seldom cast aside their habiliments of sleep, and which, if they do sometimes enjoy a rare moment of activity, will quickly fall into silence and disuse again, so that those to whom they belong, and who should be proud and thankful for their possession, are careless of what they have and even inclined to deny their ownership. Pascal, making full use of the whole of his emotions, looked for the same habit in others, and spoke of difficulties which are apparent only to those who share with him this prodigality of senses.

He saw no less of strangeness and confusion in the emotions which man obeys than in the acts to which this obedience prompts him. There are, it would seem, many forces, all active and often in opposition the one to the other, which bring the human mind to a marked disorder; so that at one moment an action may be seen as good and noble, yet a moment after, and for no apparent reason which might account for so sudden a

change, the same matter will appear dull and colourless, and worth nothing but the slightest effort. Of such a habit is imagination, which may play the most surprising tricks with men, causing them to see all things in such a changing fashion that it becomes a hard and even impossible matter to fix any standard of judgment which shall make allowance for the deception of this sentiment. Pascal is careful to maintain that this power of imagination is not the prerogative, nor yet most commonly possessed by simple folk ; he urges rather that it is found in the equipment of the wise man, and so becomes the more respected and of greater influence. “Je ne parle pas des fous, je parle des plus sages, et c’est parmi eux que l’imagination a le grand don de persuader les hommes. La raison a beau crier, elle ne peut mettre le prix aux choses.”

And again, on the same subject, he would not have it thought that he, in any way, estimated this possession of imagination at too low a value.

“Cette superbe puissance ennemie de la raison, qui se plaît à la contrôler et à la dominer pour montrer combien elle peut en toutes choses, a établi dans l’homme une seconde nature.”

And in an even stronger fashion :

“Qui dispense la réputation ? Qui donne le respect et la vénération aux personnes, aux ouvrages, aux lois, aux grands, sinon cette faculté imaginante ? Toutes les richesses de la terre sont insuffisantes sans son consentement.”

He was clearly convinced of the power and importance of imagination. He had named it the enemy of reason, and was confident that it had little to do with logic and did not rest upon a scrutiny of facts ; yet it was clearly of a very considerable force, and might play a larger part in the shaping of human lives than a just and careful judgment, or a due appreciation of hard and honest work.

Into almost all our actions there enters some determining motive that is not the one which we would have it be. We set out to do a charitable action, thinking ourselves moved by pity and the desire to lessen suffering, yet if we analyse the motives which do really urge us, we will likely find them far other than we had imagined ; convention, the continuing of a custom, the state of our health, or the prospect of our fortunes will not improbably guide us to the action. So that,

in a manner of speaking, we are disposed to do charitable actions by the state of our digestions, and give a penny to the beggar because at the moment it suits our conceit to distribute alms. Imagination, engendered and aided by physical circumstances, induces us to think pleasantly of this matter of the bestowal of the penny, yet we disguise the act and say that in giving to others we serve Love, whereas in our hearts we know that we serve ourselves, since we are temporarily disposed to set a high value on the act of almsgiving. If an act be voluntary, if it be the will of the doer, it shall be done to please himself ; so that the most of our deeds are performed to satisfy ourselves, and even the highest and noblest, when they are not compelled by force, are of a like selfishness. Thus the motives that result in any action are most commonly of a mixed nature, and, even if pure, which may perhaps occasionally occur, not greatly to be vaunted ; yet by the acts themselves we may judge whether a man pleases himself in a noble or ignoble fashion. Of this confusion of common and selfish motives giving rise to very difficult and fearless accomplishment, Pascal was aware, and so came to hold no high

opinion of the mind of man, which rested impotent in the midst of such disorder. In man he saw a being troubled and in the dark, who might be turned from his most cherished endeavour by a cause whose origin he did not know.

“L'esprit,” he writes, “de ce souverain juge du monde n'est pas si indépendant, qu'il ne soit sujet à être troublé par le premier tintamarre qui se fait autour de lui. Il ne faut pas le bruit d'un canon pour empêcher ses pensées : il ne faut que le bruit d'une girouette ou d'une poulie. Ne vous étonnez pas s'il ne raisonne pas bien à présent ; une mouche bourdonne à ses oreilles : c'en est assez pour le rendre incapable de bon conseil. Si vous voulez qu'il puisse trouver la vérité, chassez cet animal qui tient sa raison en echec et trouble cette puissante intelligence qui gouverne les villes et les royaume. Le plaisant dieu que voilà ! O ridicolosissimo eroe !”

There is an obvious bitterness in this picture which Pascal makes of the feeble resistance which man can offer to the most insignificant annoyance. There is almost a note of complaint when he speaks of “cette puissante intelligence qui gouverne les villes et les royaumes,” as if he felt that there

was some very consuming evil in the matter, since in the human race there showed so many possibilities of greatness and so little fulfilment. He had, indeed, been very hopeful of the greatness of his mind, had even thought it capable of understanding what was truth, and so, coming to a maturer conception, and seeing himself and all his fellows groping very haltingly, he suffered a greater disillusion, and could not free his thoughts of all bitter regret for the dream that he had held.

Yet, in spite of this feebleness, this blind incapacity to realise his dreams, there exists in man a power to fashion visions, to conceive and pursue an ideal, the realisation of which he has no hope of gaining ; and in this trait, which is in all men, lies the truest claim that he may hold to greatness. Through discomfort and misfortune, in face of peril, in ease and prosperity, we are mainly concerned with one thing : to seek distinction and show ourselves nearer to our ideal. And our daily occupation is very closely connected with this effort. We may seek the distinction of domesticity, or the glory that comes to the warrior or politician ; we may be absorbed in the investi-

gation of some science, or in the creation of beautiful things ; we may seek no wider fame than that which comes to a man with a gift of conversation or an engaging manner of singing ballad songs ; or it may be that we depart from convention and would fix our ideal in theft, or lying, or in murder ; but no matter in what channel our hopes of distinction may run, whether they are peaceable or warlike, common or rare, we are all intent to set ourselves somehow apart from our fellows, so that when we come to grasp the hand of Death, we may look back upon our lives and feel that in some matter, though it shall be of the least importance, we performed more ably than did those about us, that at least somewhere on our journey we held ourselves straight and walked briskly after the fashion that—we imagine—the perfect man should walk.

And this instinct, though it may lead to little achievement that is remarkable, and though it is by no means the single object of man's endeavours, is yet so important that it cannot be overlooked by any who take an interest in human character, but must be named one of the guiding forces of

man's life. For to endeavour in any fashion at all to achieve a nobler development is to proclaim a belief in, and an admiration for, that which is not within our experience, but only in our instincts; is to worship the dim ideal to which we give the name Perfect. And by engaging ourselves in the quest of this unrealised thing, which we all must do, though we pride ourselves upon our slavery to reason, we become fixed in the service of that of the existence of which we have no proof, and so stand forth guided and inspired by something that is not, and never has been, on this earth, content with, even proud of, the dignity we gain in our serving.

Of this characteristic of man's nature, Pascal was firmly convinced, and to it he assigned a considerable importance. He does not allow that it acts entirely for good, or that it helps man to escape error or meanness; he even suggests that it may foster such things, but he insists on its existence, and maintains that it is the instinct of good, which causes man to have faith in something truer and more perfect.

He finds this desire to excel the cause of conduct that is both mean and false, and which is yet,

by the paradox of human character, the origin of much that is noble and good.

“La nature de l’amour propre et de ce moi humain est de n’aimer que soi et de ne considérer que soi. Mais que fera-t-il ? Il ne saurait empêcher que cet objet qu’il aime ne soit plein de défauts et de misères : il veut être grand, et il se voit petit ; il vaut être heureux, et il se voit misérable ; il veut être parfait, et il se voit plein d’imperfections ; il veut être l’objet de l’amour et de l’estime des hommes, et il voit que ses défauts ne meritent que leur aversion et leur mépris. Cet embarras où il se trouve produit en lui la plus injuste et la plus criminelle passion qu’il soit possible de s’imaginer ; car il conçoit une haine mortelle contre cette vérité qui le reprend et qui le convainc de ses défauts. Il désirerait de l’anéantir, et ne pouvant la détruire en elle-meme, il la détruit, autant qu’il peut, dans sa connaissance et dans celles des autres ; c’est-à-dire qu’il met tout son soin à couvrir ses défauts et aux autres et à soi-meme, et qu’il ne peut souffrir qu’on les lui fasse voir, ni qu’on les voie.”

The wish to appear before his fellows as in some way approaching to a high standard of behaviour, is so strong that man will not scruple to deceive

those about him, if he can. Yet the whole matter, the deception or the honest endeavour, is due to the overmastering longing that he has to come near to the high conduct of his dreams. And Pascal, seeing this, and feeling that this thing may sustain men in the midst of much trial, causing them to keep faith with that which they have at heart, is inclined to allow that on this account they will not simply be led to deception, but raised to better things. “*Malgré la vue de toutes nos misères qui nous touchent, qui nous tiennent à la gorge, nous avons un instinct que nous ne pouvons réprimer qui nous élève.*” One point shone for Pascal in the midst of much darkness : that this instinct was in man, and that it was one of the main forces of his nature.

Even with this point of light the way did not appear easy to him ; and he has shown, in some of the grandest prose that his countrymen cherish in their literature, that he was confused and appalled at the mysterious and troubled quality of life.

“*Quand je considère,*” he writes, “*la petite durée de ma vie absorbée dans l'éternité précédant et suivant ; le petit espace que je remplis, et même que je vois, abîmé dans l'infinie immensité des*

espaces que j'ignore et qui m'ignorent, je m'effraie et m'étonne de me voir ici plutôt que là ; car il n'y a point de raison pourquoi ici plutôt que là, pourquoi à présent plutôt que lors. Qui m'y a mis ? Par l'ordre et la conduite de qui ce lieu et ce temps a-t-il été destiné à moi ? ”

Such thoughts as these are not of comfortable proportions, so that if a man is no more than aware of them, and has not spent long hours in an effort to find some answer to such unanswerable questions, he will certainly be filled with awe before the vast matter that his mind has sight of. To pursue the speculation further, and to allow the imagination to wander uncurbed in such a void, is to go seeking disquiet from which, perhaps, there is no radical cure. And Pascal has left a record that he did continue in such speculations.

“ Pourquoi,” he asked, “ ma connaissance est-elle bornée ? ma taille ? ma durée à 100 ans plutôt qu’ à 1000 ? Quelle raison a eue la nature de me la donner telle et de choisir ce nombre plutôt qu’un autre dans l’infinité, desquels il n’y a pas plus de raison de choisir l’un que l’autre, rien ne tentant plus que l’autre.”

To these questions there is no answer ; and all that they may give is confusion and distress to him who asks them. Pascal, thinking too much of these things, voiced most truly his feelings when he cried, "*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*" For as a man may, on some clear night, look up to the stars and lose himself in the effort to comprehend infinity, so he may have knowledge of vast and dim places in his understanding in which no effort of his shall find any landmark or limitation. And as Pascal wrote himself, seeing that which all men who think have seen : "*Hasard donne les pensées, le hasard les ôte.*" In the matter of our thoughts we are in the hands of chance ; and to exclude them when once they have entered into our minds is no light task. So, engaged upon such a train of thought, Blaise Pascal was not able to check himself, but was moved to multiply a series of insoluble riddles.

"*Que l'homme contemple donc la nature entière dans sa haute et pleine majesté.*"

A matter, it must appear, that man is incapable to compass, and which led Pascal to the statement of utter confusion.

"*Tout ce monde visible n'est qu'un trait im-*

perceptible dans l'ample sein de la nature. Nulle idée n'en approche. Nous avons beau enfler nos conceptions au delà des espaces imaginables : nous n'enfantons que des atomes, au prix de la réalité des choses."

And again :

"Que l'homme étant revenu à soi, considère ce qu'il est au prix de ce qui est ; qu'il se regarde comme égaré dans ce canton détourné de la nature ; et que de ce petit cachot où il se trouve logé, j'entends l'univers, il apprenne à estimer la terre, les royaumes, les villes et soi-même son juste prix.

"Qu'est ce qu'un homme dans l'infini ?"

And in face of this amazing question he would lead the wandering imagination to the contemplation of the infinitely small, and show, stretching on either side of this wondering animal that is man, immense and endless distances. And, showing this, he turns again to a dumb and silent admiration, setting forth his questions to which there are no answers.

"Qui se considérera de la sorte s'effrayera de soi-même, et se considérant soutenu dans la masse que la nature lui a donnée, entre ces deux abîmes

de l'infini et du néant, il tremblera dans la vue de ces merveilles ; et je crois que sa curiosité se changeant en admiration, il sera plus disposé à les contempler en silence qu' à les rechercher avec présomption.

“Car enfin qu'est ce que l'homme dans la nature ? Un néant à l'égard de l'infini, un tout à l'égard du néant : un milieu entre rien et tout. Infiniment éloigné de comprendre les extrêmes, la fin des choses et leur principe sont pour lui invinciblement cachés dans un secret impénétrable, également incapable de voir le néant d'où il est tiré et l'infini où il est englouti.

“Que fera-t-il donc, sinon d'apercevoir quelque apparence du milieu des choses, dans un désespoir éternel de connaître ni leur principe ni leur fin.”

He had realised these things, had known them, as men may realise and know such matters—for there is no realisation of them beyond the knowledge that they are—and he was come to see man measuring infinity with finite vision, struggling very earnestly to learn where he stands or what he is. It is not possible to affirm that Pascal, shaping such conceptions, had passed his life confident on the matter of man's place and destiny.

But he was not simply concerned with the perception of these matters ; he searched among so much incomprehensibility to find an explanation, and made an eager note of anything which should suggest a lightening of the gloom. In the fact that man was so inclined to investigate his position, and to continue his search in the face of such great odds, he found some hopeful sign, the promise of something in human character which proclaims a kinship with all nature, making man part of all that of which he is aware.

“ L’homme, par exemple, a rapport à tout ce qu’il connaît. Il a besoin de lieu pour le contenir, de temps pour durer, de mouvement pour vivre, d’éléments pour le composer, de chaleur et d’aliments pour le nourrir, d’air pour respirer. Il voit la lumière, il sent les corps ; enfin tout tombe sous son alliance.”

In physical matters he is closely allied with the things about him and has need of them to nourish and support his life ; and, so the argument would seem to run, he has other needs besides those of the body, which must be supplied by other sources not visible to his eyes, but acknowledged by the mind which desires them. And with these things

he would seek a deeper acquaintance, in the same manner as he would discover the nature of the fire which warms him and the light in which he lives, deeming them of no less importance.

“C’est une chose étrange qu’ils ont voulu comprendre les principes des choses et de là arriver jusqu’ à connaître tout, par une présomption aussi infinie que leur objet. Car il est sans doute qu’on ne peut former ce dessein sans une présomption ou sans une capacité infinie, comme la nature.”

Yet Pascal would not have it supposed that, because this desire to know all may be held the sign of a great and undeveloped capacity in man, in his present condition he is gifted with any clear understanding. His position is rather antagonistic to any profound perception.

“Connaissons donc notre portée ; nous sommes quelque chose et ne sommes pas tout. Ce que nous avons d’être nous dérobe la connaissance des premiers principes qui naissent du néant, et le peu que nous avons d’être nous cache la vue de l’infini.”

This half-way position is opposed to the possibility of arriving at any final conclusion. Pascal found that, so placed, man was incapable of per-

ceiving any extreme ; too much noise will deafen him ; a strong light will blind him ; extreme heat and cold he cannot feel ; at the ends of his life, in infancy and in old age, his mind suffers a disadvantage ; too much learning will lead him to confusion and the realisation that he is very ignorant. "Les sciences ont deux extrémités qui se touchent : la première est la pure ignorance naturelle où se trouvent tous les hommes en naissant. L'autre extrémité est celle où arrivent les grandes âmes qui ayant parcouru tout ce que les hommes peuvent savoir, trouvent qu'ils ne savent rien et se rencontrent en cette meme ignorance d'où ils étaient partis."

Convinced of such a condition in man, Pascal is not optimistic of his ever finding his own way.

"Voilà notre état véritable. C'est ce qui nous rend incapables de savoir certainement et d'ignorer absolument. Nous voguons sur un milieu vaste, toujours incertains et flottants, poussés d'un bout vers l'autre."

He is not inclined to make light of the difficulties which face him, or to suggest that he shall come to any understanding of his nature ; yet he insists that there is in him something that is more

than physical, but does not suggest that, with this more complex being, there shall be found a clearer sight, nor any wider understanding.

“Et ainsi si nous sommes simplement matériels, nous ne pouvons rien du tout connaître ; et si nous sommes composés d'esprit et de matière, nous ne pouvons connaître parfaitement les choses simples, spirituelles et corporelles.”

In such a manner he throws out, as it were, defences to meet the suggestion that if man is a spiritual being and is primarily associated with other than material things, there is in that circumstance no reason why he should not have a full understanding of the one side or the other of his life.

He attempts to show man placed in a difficult and disquieting position, aware of the superior forces with which he fights, but conscious of, and spurred on by, a belief that the fight is worth sustaining, and that to conduct himself with courage, even in the face of almost certain defeat, is the best thing that he can do.

“Le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque belle que soit la comédie en tout le rest. On jette enfin de la terre sur la tête, et en voilà pour jamais.”

Here is an aspect of the business that causes the efforts of humanity towards truth and right to appear as useless and ill-judged. Into the last scene of the comedy which each man plays there will come the character of Death, and for ever the grave will put an ending to endeavour. It is apparent to the most mean-spirited that in such a case justice and truth, ideals to which we pay much reverential homage, have no part at all in life. If, when the earth falls about our heads, we have finished and exist no more, if in death we cease, then this game which we play with so much earnestness is gone very much against us. We have put into it some not inconsiderable stakes of suffering and toil ; we have spent much time, that we might have passed in pleasanter occupations, in dull exercises by which we hoped to increase our skill and so perform with the better grace ; we look, not to win, but to hear of the result, and to know in what minor points we have overcome our adversaries, and whether we have somewhat improved by our efforts ; most certainly we do not play on the certainty that at the end we shall disappear as a match flame in the wind. Yet against this possibility we can set up no proof, and to any

man who maintains its likelihood we are dumb, having nothing wherewith to combat him save our horror of such an end—the which he most probably shares with us. And, knowing this, in the shadow of annihilation and non-existence we do fill our brief lives with many actions that are not wise in the view of our immediate and material happiness, and, amongst numberless deeds which we despise and do yet commit, there are some that we avoid, naming them not right. If any thought is given to the matter, it assumes a strange and perplexing proportion. It is a preposterous supposition that, without any other hope, man does keep himself from certain actions that others may profit by his example, and that later generations may follow in his footsteps when he has ceased to be. Such behaviour would appear nothing but a vast misplaced conceit, fantastic in its working, that should be the incarnation of a useless spirit of proselytism. The reason for our conduct clearly does not rest on such magnificent folly. Whether we accept a hope of immortality, or whether we rest with a kind of despairing resignation in the prospect of annihilation, we adjust our actions to an ideal code which we set up, naming some right and others

wrong ; and though we cannot explain this code nor give any reason why it should be, and though it may differ strangely for different men, we are very conscious of its existence and hold very steadfastly to it. So that we not uncommonly maintain that there never has been, nor ever will be, a man without some code of honour, and who did not, in his heart, recognise some change of character in his actions, making a distinction between good and bad. Upon this distinguishing instinct rest all religions, and upon it Pascal set his hope and the justification of his creed.

“*Pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme.*” This was probably one of the thoughts that gave Pascal the greatest pleasure. He had mused long upon the question of human destiny ; had found himself and all men blind in the face of those things that seem the most important ; but he was sensible to the stirring of many desires, and aware of an admiration that he could not explain. So, finding that in his thoughts, in the unordered and unreasoned suggestions that came to his mind, there was a constant inclination, he proclaimed this the most important and the noblest part of his whole nature.

“ L’homme n’est qu’un roseau le plus faible de la nature, mais c’est un roseau pensant. Il ne faut pas que l’univers entier s’arme pour l’écraser. Une vapeur, une goutte d’eau, suffit pour le tuer. Mais quand l’univers l’écraserait, l’homme serait encore plus noble que ce qui le tue, parce qu’il sait qu’il meurt ; et l’avantage que l’univers a sur lui l’univers n’en sait rien.

“ Toute notre dignité consiste donc en la pensée. C’est de là qu’il faut nous relever, non de l’espace et de la durée que nous ne saurions remplir. Travaillons donc à bien pensée : voilà le principe de la morale.”

Here then is Pascal upon a somewhat prouder note ; he has come to see man in an aspect of dignity and importance, no longer straining to perceive that which is too distant for his sight. But he had drawn a picture of human impotence from which he does not go back ; he rather finds in the confusion of man, and in his wandering and unguided thoughts, the source of the most of his nobility. He is insistent that all men must think.

“ L’homme est visiblement fait pour penser ; c’est toute sa dignité et tout son mérite, et tout son devoir est de penser comme il faut ; or l’ordre

de la pensée est de commencer par soi, et par son auteur et sa fin."

Upon a casual reading it would seem that Pascal proclaims that the object of humanity should be to bury itself in a desperate attempt to comprehend that which is incomprehensible. He had suggested that we were placed between two infinities, incapable of understanding what lay on either side of us, not able to arrive at certainty or to rest in ignorance. To follow such statements with the suggestion that the chief of human dignities consists in thinking about the origin and destiny of man, is to make of confusion the most dignified of mortal attributes. This Pascal surely did not intend. It is, indeed, far more probable that when he spoke of thought he did not have in mind that quality of our mental equipment which will sift what little evidence it may happen upon, seeking to put some order and value to its discoveries, but the fancies of the mind, the creations of the brain which do not have their origin in any material object, which are not connected with facts, and which have more power to influence men than all the other forces that they may encounter. The prejudices, the

convictions, the beliefs that we hold, contain, in some sort, the only real thoughts that we give birth to, and they are for each man the most private and the most secure property he may possess. For if we adopt the atomic theory, or if we make a discovery of the like importance for ourselves, we only place the seal of our approval on the work of other men, or, following the rules of investigation and accepting the conventions of thought that others have formulated, we prepare something that we would justify and make intelligible before the world. But within the guarded chamber of our own imagination we fashion and adorn very different thoughts ; into that secret cabinet we may retire and be alone, nor is any of the work that is therein prepared designed to meet other eyes ; when we have entered there we are ourselves, and stand stripped of the disguise in which we play our pose before the world. From that silent store chamber of our beliefs we draw the principles that guide us and the most abiding comfort of our lives ; and the thoughts which we keep enclosed there are the children of our own minds, and in their form reflect their parentage ; within its walls we come to a knowledge

of a vague and shadowy beauty that is very real to us, though we cannot shape it, of a consciousness of the vast nature of existence which finds no intelligible expression in words, nor any embodiment in our acts. And since we cannot put any tangibility about such unformed imaginings, we are not able to present them, even if we would, to those about us, so that the resulting deeds, which we perform in obedience to the inspiration of these thoughts, are not understood by other men. For much of any man's conduct will appear ill-judged and reasonless in the estimation of his fellows.

When, therefore, Pascal wrote that man must think, for therein lay his chief nobility, and that his thoughts ought to begin with himself, he was in all likelihood intent upon this development of individual feelings, which, though it shall not give to anyone an understanding of his origin and destiny, shall nevertheless help him to know himself, and to realise that his feelings and his instinct are more powerful, and more vital to him, than that voluntary enchainment within the limits of his comprehension, which he calls reason.

It is very noticeable that when Pascal insists

upon the importance of thought, the tone of his writing is somewhat changed. He is no longer anxious to describe a state of bewilderment ; he is concerned with an explanation and speaks in a more assured fashion. He has done with the portion of his work in which he could not honestly find his way, and is come to the deductions, from which, though he cannot muster any proofs, he need not fear to be dislodged.

He had not flinched before the sight of obscurity and doubt, but he was engaged, with all of the energy and perseverance that was in his character, to find some good escape from the stagnation of acknowledged doubt. "Que sais-je?" had said Montaigne, and made it the motto of his writing, and around that placid acceptation of perplexity had built his scheme of ethics. It was in opposition to such an attitude that Pascal struggled. "What do I know?" was in his conception a saying that should not come without revolt to the lips of any man. "I do not know" was but a true statement, and one which he did not himself attempt to forego. The calmness in doubt that will not hazard a statement of ignorance, but must make a question of it, that in the whole matter nothing definite may

appear, was to him unnecessary and intolerable. So that he, fully aware of the perilous nature of any assumption, had yet on one point satisfied himself that there was light, and was resolved to make the best of what he had. "Nous sommes incapables de ne pas souhaiter la vérité et le bonheur, et ne sommes capables ni de certitude ni de bonheur." Of this fact he felt himself convinced, and was resolute to build upon it.

In his estimation of the philosophic teaching with which he was acquainted, he does not show himself angry or in any bitter opposition. He recognises the worth of much of it, but is astonished that the conclusions should be held to bring any satisfaction.

"Tous leurs principes sont vrais : des pyrrhoniens, des stoïques, des athées, etc. Mais leurs conclusions sont fausses, parce que les principes opposés sont vrais aussi."

And, in a spirit of surprise that men could manage their affairs in such a fashion :

"Il est indubitable que : que l'âme soit mortelle ou immortelle, cela doit mettre une différence entière dans la morale ; et cependant les philosophes ont conduit la morale indépendamment de cela."

Pascal was himself so inclined to a belief in immortality, and felt so much horror at the prospect that his dream might be denied him, that he could not appreciate the attitude of those men who conduct their lives in a complete doubt about the matter, and who yet set up a standard of good and seek to obey it. His mind, strongly biassed to a certain view, would not conjure up the picture of a man aware of the instinct of good that is in him, yet viewing with an apparent calmness the disappearance of himself and his ideals in death.

But feeling that he could not be robbed of the instinct by the aid of which he hoped to find some day the escape from all his difficulties, he was resolved that his sentiments and his convictions might and should be used as the important guiding forces of his life ; and, acting upon this consideration, he was, it would seem, content to view the imperfect nature and indecision of human opinions without any expression of perplexed despair.

“Chaque chose est ici vraie en partie, fausse en partie. La vérité essentielle n'est pas ainsi : elle est toute pure et toute vraie. Ce mélange la déshonore et l'anéantit. Rien n'est purement vrai, et ainsi rien n'est vrai en l'entendant du pur vrai.

On dira qu'il est vrai que l'homicide est mauvais : oui, car nous connaissons bien le mal et le faux. Mais que dira-t-on qui soit bon ? La chasteté ? Je dis que non, car le monde finirait. Le mariage ? Non : la continence vaut mieux. De ne point tuer ? Non, car les désordres seraient horribles, et les méchants tueraient les bons. De tuer ? Non, car cela détruit la nature. Nous n'avons ni vrai ni bien qu'en partie, et mêlé de mal et de faux."

He is not inclined to lessen the complexity of the problems which face man, and to suggest that the task of man is in any sort a light one ; but he presents a means which, in his consideration, may render the whole business subject to a sure guidance. And with this intent he dwells more fully upon the puzzle that is life, showing that there must always exist among men two schools : the one teaching that nothing may be surely known ; the other that it is no impossible thing for man to find his way, since he can discover in himself instincts that shall guide him on his road more surely than any hardly reasoned principles. And to this latter teaching Pascal himself would cling, maintaining that without it all progress or action is impossible ; for, if a man is dependent upon proof

alone, he cannot tell whether he sleep or wake, whether in his contact with other men he does not move in a land of dreams, surrounded by phantoms of his own imagination. To avoid losing himself in such a nightmare, he turns to his instinct, and, proclaiming that he is convinced that he wakes and does actually suffer those experiences of which he has knowledge, acts upon the assumption of material existence ; and here he triumphantly displays his doctrine and avows that man is impotent to depend upon other guidance than his feelings.

“Que fera donc l'homme en cet état ? Doutera-t-il de tout ? doutera-t-il s'il veille, si on le pince, si on le brule ? Doutera-t-il s'il doute ? doutera-t-il s'il est ? On n'en peut venir là ; et je mets en fait qu'il n'y a jamais eu de pyrrhonien effectif parfait. La nature soutient la raison impuissante, et l'empêche d'extravaguer jusqu' à ce point.”

It is impossible, he urges, that doubt shall act thus far upon a man ; nature will step in to save his reason, and instinct will convince him of his existence. Reiterating his plea for the importance and effect of the emotions, he continues :

“Nous connaissons la vérité, non seulement par la raison, mais encore par le cœur ; c'est de

cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes, et c'est en vain que le raisonnement, qui n'y a point de part, essaie de les combattre. Les pyrrhoniens, qui n'ont que cela pour objet, y travaillent inutilement. Nous savons que nous ne rêvons point, quelque impuissance ou nous soyons de le prouver par raison ; cette impuissance ne conclut autre chose que la faiblesse de notre raison, mais non pas l'incertitude de toutes nos connaissances, comme ils le prétendent. Car la connaissance des premiers principes, comme qu'il y a espace, temps, mouvement, nombres, est aussi ferme qu'aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent, et c'est sur ces connaissances du cœur et de l'instinct qu'il faut que la raison s'appuie, et qu'elle y fonde tout son discours. Le cœur sent qu'il y a trois dimensions dans l'espace et que les nombres sont infinis ; et la raison démontre ensuite qu'il n'y a point deux nombres carrés dont l'un soit double de l'autre. Les principes se sentent, les propositions se concluent ; et le tout avec certitude, quoique par différentes voies. Et il est aussi ridicule que la raison demande au cœur des preuves de ses premiers principes pour vouloir y consentir, qu'il

serait ridicule que le cœur demandât à la raison un sentiment de toutes les propositions qu'elle démontre, pour vouloir les recevoir."

Here, then, is the main conclusion of Pascal : that reason and instinct are not only separate, but of an equal importance ; that they do both play very large and vital parts in the life of man ; but that without assuming that certain of his instincts are true man would not be able to move at all, since, unless he adopt some premise, he is unprovided with any equipment with which to steer a course ; and that, as he is compelled to make use of his instinct, and as he does so serve himself in many instances without hesitation, he would do well to consider in what degree this thing may be held the chief factor of his nature.

In such a fashion Pascal sought a basis for his religion, and in such arguments he founded his hope of happiness.

CHAPTER XI

To the *Pensées* of Pascal it is only possible to assign a rough and uncertain order, and there is no means by which these notes may be set in any chronological sequence ; so that to argue that the author turned from any particular point, deeming its discussion adequate, and then occupied himself with some other which may seem to follow from the first, is a proceeding of some temerity, and very open to attack. Although this circumstance is unfortunate, it is not in any manner antagonistic to the understanding of the difficulties that faced Pascal, or of the way in which he dealt with them. For it is a justifiable assumption that before he set pen to paper in the chronicling of these notes, he held some general idea of that which he wished to do, and was in fact putting his thoughts in writing for a fixed purpose ; and it is certain that the larger portion of the work, if

not the whole of it, was accomplished after he had come into a close union with Port Royal, and when he was settled in a habit of living from which he did not again change. So we may suppose him, before he set about the preliminaries for his defence of religion which never was written, already holding those views which he has expressed in the *Pensées*, and putting them on paper when they came to him in most intelligible form.

It is necessary, and it is a necessity which should not be hardly accepted, to suppose him honest in his statements, and to believe that the emotions which he describes he had himself experienced. In this manner he will be seen attempting to guide others along the path which he had trodden, and to bring them, though perhaps by a rough way, to the same secure resting place.

He adopted the principle that the emotions and inclinations of the mind were to be trusted, that not to heed them was to confirm chaos and abandon any chance of settlement ; but he is eager to point out that such a course will not remove all difficulties, or give to man a smooth and untroubled way in life.

There is no want of decision, nor yet any avowal of calm certainty in this statement :

“ Je regarde de toutes parts, et ne vois partout qu’obscurité. La nature ne m’offre rien qui ne soit matière de doute et d’inquiétude. Si je n’y voyais rien qui marquât une Divinité, je me déterminerais à n’en rien croire. Si je voyais partout les marques d’un Créateur, je reposerais en paix dans la foi. Mais voyant trop pour nier et trop peu pour m’assurer, je suis dans un état à plaindre, et où j’ai souhaité cent fois que si un Dieu la soutient, elle le marquât sans équivoque ; et que si les marques qu’elle en donne sont trompeuses, elle les supprimât tout à fait ; qu’elle dit tout ou rien, afin que je visse quel parti je dois suivre. Au lieu qu’en l’état où je suis, ignorant ce que je suis et ce que je dois faire, je ne connais ni ma condition, ni mon devoir. Mon cœur tend tout entier à connaître où est le vrai bien, pour le suivre. Rien ne me serait trop cher pour l’éternité.”

This is the lament of an agnostic who, groping in the gloom of uncertainty, would give the full tally of his possessions to find his feet upon a hard and clear-marked road. When Pascal thus re-

corded the state of doubt in which he was, or once had been, he likely had the idea that the recital of his own condition might carry some feeling of companionship to those who felt as he did, making them read his work with the more interest and pay a fuller attention to its conclusions. For it is not possible that this statement is other than a note that draws the picture of a trouble which the writer himself had felt. He who believes in a God and in the immortality of man, will imagine many difficulties that may hinder others from the acceptance of his belief ; but that which is, surely, unknown to him, if he has not at any time doubted his own faith, is the perfect balance between negative and positive assumptions ; in which state a man, doing all that lies within his power to see himself convinced and justified in one assumption, shall make no movement from his motionless bewilderment. It may therefore be stated as a fact hardly to be questioned, that Pascal had experienced the hesitation of agnosticism ; that he had felt himself impotent to make any decision or to assume any explanation about his post-mortal condition ; and that, though he did very fervently hate and fear the dark, he was powerless to throw

light upon his way. "Mon cœur tend tout entier à connaître où est le vrai bien, pour le suivre. Rien ne me serait trop cher pour l'éternité." He was possessed with the desire to engage himself in some high service, was eager, and later showed that he was very tireless, in the execution of that which he conceived his duty, and did not count any work too heavy which was proved of use and of a lasting purpose. Into all his actions he brought a great enthusiasm, and held at all times his own material comfort but a very minor thing. He was a man whose accomplishments were of the mind ; where he worked physical ability and the practical businesses of daily life were little heeded ; his wares were the ideas of men ; his tools his thoughts, fashioned to his own liking after the pattern of those of others ; his craft, the craft of all who deal in thoughts, to shape his wares so that they should be beautiful and simple and, in so far as he could make them, true. So he was fundamentally engaged in discovering a pure and real explanation ; whether in mathematics, or more vaguely in philosophy, he had sworn enmity with all confusion and from earliest childhood sought a straight and well-lit way. And in the pursuit of

his employment he was neither half hearted nor given to any pessimistic view, but gifted with the consciousness of a not inconsiderable ability and filled with a firm hope of progress ; yet he was deprived of occupation, and brought to think lightly of his former achievement, seeing it founded on uncertain principles. He had suffered much ; his body was weak and sickly, and it is not to be imagined that he came to his scientific distinction without many hours of disappointment and fatigue ; and this, it would seem, he accepted cheerfully as his share of the world's ill. That which such a man as he could not suffer without murmur, that which was for him the bitter dregs of all he loved in life, was the disappearance of the vision of truth, the veiling of the ideal which had given him his work, and hope, and the promise of triumphant happiness, which in conquering death should incarnate his dreams.

Had Pascal been a man of slower temper, had he brought into his occupations a less strong enthusiasm, or had imagination set a more sombre colouring upon the pictures of his brain, he would have taken this spoliation of his aims in better part, finding in other endeavours some not in-

sufficient substitute for that which he had lost ; but the desire of happiness was in his heart, the vision of his goal was very real to him, and when the existence of his imagined haven seemed to him uncertain, he was left illusionless and wanting any object which by comparison could stir him to a new eagerness. He journeyed quite abnormally absorbed in coming to his destination ; and we may suppose him, when abroad in the sunlight and soothed with the scent of flowers, unable to take a full measure of enjoyment unless he were persuaded that the government of right and truth had set this beauty upon earth. He was eager to find some guiding motive in the world's existence, believing it just ; and, being of no pessimistic nature, nor yet ignorant of the meaning of enjoyment, was persuaded that in laughter and in happiness lay the better side of man.

“Tous les hommes recherchent d'être heureux : cela est sans exception. Quelques différents moyens qu'ils y emploient, ils tendent tous à ce but.”

Of this fact he was firmly persuaded, founding his belief upon the urging of his own desires ; so that when, in his own case, he faced the possibility

of the destruction of such happiness as he could conceive, he saw before him the darkness of disillusionment, empty of joy and purposeless. Being entered, after a useless and unreasoned asceticism, upon a more ordinary and bolder course of living, he had come to some knowledge of the world, had found in such a life some happiness—the converse is a purely unjustifiable assumption—had tasted a wine of fuller and nobler vintage, but was deprived of any satisfying draft. In a mood of some embitterment—to suppose him happy in his disappointment would be to deny him the characteristics of humanity—he examined the nature of that strange confusion into which all men come at birth, and has set it on paper that he found therein much matter for bewilderment. He had followed the Christian faith, and had held its explanations sufficient, yet, unless the most of his writings are false, he had felt distrust of his position, and had doubted of that which he most fervently sought to accept. For a man will hardly elaborate the difficulties of forming a conclusion upon the subject of religion, dwelling upon the absence of all proof, and will not, as his strongest argument, put forth the plea

that it is better to make some assumption—though it be false—than to stumble in the dark, if he has always held to a simple creed ; but with a greater boldness, and with a finer trust in his own convictions, he will call on the quality of faith, and, denouncing proofs and setting aside difficulties, will cry that he believes. Pascal would seem occupied with the endeavour not to establish a certainty, not to enunciate triumphantly a hypothesis which should appear convincing to all men, but to show that in the hope which he held to there was no vital impossibility. And in that circumstance he separates himself from those men who, strong in the belief which they possess, have set about its defence. For such men the matter is more properly an attack, and shaped in a spirit of proselytism, which seeks by the overwhelming nature of its conclusions to force its tenets on all those capable of understanding. In such defences there are most commonly many foolish and weak arguments, and the whole matter is usually very powerless to affect any person who was not before convinced. Because the most part of these so-called vindications are written by men who have happily enjoyed the undisturbed possession of

their faith, and who, mistaking the attitude of those holding other views, seek to force upon all men, by means of the display of much questionable evidence, the thing which they regard as true ; not heeding that they themselves were not convinced by evidence, and that belief, which belongs to the emotions, is very far divorced from fact.

There is in the *Pensées* of Pascal a point which continually recurs ; the insistence that is laid upon it suggests that the matter was very continually in his thoughts ; its reappearance at all stages of his argument shows it the basis of his assumptions : it is that the human mind is incapable of comprehending its own situation, but that it is very vitally affected by an instinct that induces a belief in the existence of a condition more pure and more perfect than its own, in which those dim longings, which do so forcibly compel it, shall be understandable, and in which their course shall be explained. It is upon this question of instinct that the faith of Pascal, and with him of many other men, would seem to hang ; here is the impregnable fortress of his religion, here the capital of his belief. And if he had never wavered, or

doubted, in his conviction of the truth of the Christian creed, and indeed, of all religion, it would seem strange that he was at such pains to establish the matter on a point that could not be assailed ; for he that is convinced on such a subject is little concerned with reasons or with justifications, but holds to his opinion in the same spirit in which he maintains that those things which appear before his eyes do really exist.

Furnished with this basis on which to reconstruct his faith, content in his own mind that he made no blind and foolish step, born of his strong wish for some guidance on his way, he embarked upon an assumption, making it the chief business of his life, and holding that in obeying the inclination which led him to its adoption he bowed to the same force that caused him to eat when he was hungry, or sleep when the night came. And in a passage of much interest he has set forth for others the considerations which, it is surely just to suppose, had influenced himself, and has argued that since man must take upon himself to assume something, it were better that he let his choice fall on that which should bring him the greatest comfort and the widest promise.

He begins his argument by a further statement of the great difficulties that the matter presents.

“S’il y a un Dieu, il est infiniment incompréhensible, puisque, n’ayant ni parties ni bornes, il n’a nul rapport à nous : nous sommes donc incapables de connaître ni ce qu’il est, ni s’il est. Cela étant, qui osera entreprendre de résoudre cette question ? Ce n’est pas nous, qui n’avons aucun rapport à lui.”

Continuing, he pays some tribute to the Christians who are ready to declare that their faith is not based on reason. In this matter he is assured that they are right.

“... Dieu est, ou il n’est pas. Mais de quel côté pencherons-nous ? La raison n’y peut rien déterminer. Il y a un chaos infini qui nous sépare. Il se joue un jeu à l’extrémité de cette distance infinie où il arrivera croix ou pile. Que gagerez-vous ? Par raison vous ne pouvez faire ni l’un ni l’autre : par raison, vous ne pouvez défendre nul des deux.”

Reason, he maintains, cannot enter the discussion : neither supposition can be defended by logic. And in something of a conversational form he sets forth the question of a choice.

“Ne blâmez donc pas de fausseté ceux qui ont pris un choix ; car vous n'en savez rien. Non : mais je les blâmerai d'avoir fait, non ce choix, mais un choix ; car encore que celui qui prend croix et l'autre soient en pareille faute, ils sont tous deux en faute : le juste est de ne point parier.”

It is probable that this answer had at one time very vitally concerned Pascal. He had felt that in face of so many contradictions, and by reason of the impossibility of making any single deduction that should be on an indisputable foundation, it were a better thing not to hazard any choice, but to stand apart, staking no opinion on the issue of the game. Such an attitude might well have seemed more just to a man whose single aim was certain truth ; yet to the inquiring mind of Pascal it had been an impossible task, forcing him to inaction and demanding that he should be content with doubt. To such a position he could never grow accustomed, and likely found that, though he held it a wiser thing to rest motionless than to adventure truth on so unknown a sea, he was powerless to continue without movement, but must forever make a search for some fair course of promise. And so, in the midst of his unwilling

tribute to agnosticism, he came upon a reason to abandon it ; for, finding that he could not endure to sit still in face of doubt, and that despite his best efforts he did not fail to hazard some opinion on the issue of his life, he saw in that circumstance an argument to favour some assumption, believing that the instinct which told him to find some explanation was of no less just a nature, and certainly no less compelling, than that which urged him to rest inactive.

He continues :

“Oui, mais il faut parier : cela n'est pas volontaire ; vous êtes embarqué. Lequel prenez-vous donc ? Voyons. Puisqu'il faut choisir, voyons ce qui vous intéresse le moins : vous avez deux choses à perdre, le vrai et le bien ; et deux choses à engager, votre raison et votre volonté, votre connaissance et votre béatitude ; et votre nature a deux choses à fuir, l'erreur et la misère. Votre raison, n'est pas plus blessée, puisqu'il faut nécessairement choisir, en choisissant l'un que l'autre.”

And so Pascal settled upon his main conclusion. He had found that, though he stood without any tangible support, though he was completely impotent to prove that which he maintained, yet

he was also forced to make some assumption ; he could not walk, submissive and without rebellion, in the midst of darkness and confusion. The decision lay between the existence of a power omnipotent and wise, under whose governance lay all things, and who ruled the world in pursuance of fixed and ordered principles, through whose guidance the whole universe moved to some more perfect and noble life, and, upon the other hand, confusion and deep chaos, blind struggling in which was no reason and no order, phantom hopes to which would come no realisation adding a keener suffering to a world of pain, many efforts and much strong endeavour that should find a fool's defeat in death, everywhere a ceaseless fighting, in all nature individual scheming seeking to assure its good, and upon all things, menacing each separate creature, the shadow of annihilation and a final end. To neither of these assumptions is there any sure guide. To accept the one or to accept the other is equally unjustified upon a show of facts ; to set them both aside a thing suggesting madness to a mind sunk in inquiry ; for in one of these two possibilities must lie the solution to the greatest of all problems : we are the servants

of an ordered destiny or the victims of a blind and cruel chance.

And Pascal, deeming himself forced to make some assumption, and holding himself justified in such a course, since he found no cause why the strongest of human instincts should not be obeyed as fearlessly as that crippled faculty which men call reason, embraced the teaching of his childhood, and held to the religion which he wished to believe was true. Through all his thoughts that deal more strictly with the Christian doctrines, there runs a frank avowal that the matter can in no way be subjected to any convincing proof, and with this there is always the triumphant proclamation that no reason can be named why these things should not be so. He was moved to urge with a multiple reiteration that religion must be hidden, that it was not, and never would, upon this earth, seem clear, even to those who followed it most clearly ; yet to deny it consideration on that account—we may suppose him possessed by a fine heat of contempt when he wrote upon this point—was to withhold from the most important question that lies in man's experience the treatment that is accorded to the simplest matter of daily life. Men

will venture much upon a chance, will undertake considerable enterprises, voyage far, and suffer much trouble and anxiety for an end that is uncertain, and for a gain that is not assured ; to act in a less courageous spirit when the die is cast to gather greater riches, is at best a coward's folly.

“ S'il ne fallait rien faire que pour le certain, on ne devrait rien faire pour la religion ; car elle n'est pas certaine. Mais combien de choses fait-on pour l'incertain, les voyages sur mer, les batailles ! Je dis donc qu'il ne faudrait rien faire du tout, car rien n'est certain ; et qu'il y a plus de certitude à la religion que non pas que nous voyions le jour de demain : car il n'est pas certain que nous voyions demain, mais il est certainement possible que nous ne le voyions pas. On n'en peut pas dire autant de la religion. Il n'est pas certain qu'elle soit ; mais qui osera dire qu'il est certainement possible qu'elle ne soit pas ? Or, quand on travaille pour demain et pour l'incertain, on agit avec raison.”

Therefore Pascal, his assumption made, elaborated his religion in the fashion that his instinct taught him, and was happy in such labour. To him the religion of his country and his day had always seemed beautiful and wise. If he, for a

time, hesitated to accept it, his attitude was caused by no lessening of his adoration for its God, nor by any quarrel with the tenets of its priests. He had stood in bewilderment, fearful lest he should be led to follow a road that guided him no-whither.

Strong in the assurance of his wisdom, he lived his life in the hope of his ideal, and sought and, we may suppose, found happiness in the practice of his idea of right. That his last years were very cold and ugly, that into them there came none of the warmth and glow of living, nor any appreciation of the beauty on the earth about him, was due in part to much bodily suffering, in part to a bitter disappointment that had come of a despoiled ambition, and most of all to the teaching of the religion which attracted him. For he was constantly, and in his last years continually, in great pain and weakness ; he had embarked upon a study which he imagined would give him occupation and sufficient object in his life, and had found himself despising his employment ; he had experienced love, and, seeking a further knowledge of the joy of human life, had seen the prize escape him ; and, in the religion the justification of which

he had been at such pains to establish, he held to the doctrine of the fallen state of man. For him the world was not moving forward to something better ; in his ideal men were not come from some far-distant beginning of infinite simplicity, evolving slowly to a nobler state, and with passing years appearing clothed in finer garments, and housed in a more richly appointed dwelling, but were the former companions of the gods, fallen to earth, where they must suffer until, purged of the sin which had been the cause of their ejection, they returned again to their lost home. On account of this strange doctrine, despising earth and men, and thinking only of the heaven to which he hoped to come, he wore the belt with iron spikes, shut laughter from his ears, and named joy the counterpart of sin.

To pronounce a man's life as wasted because it ill accords with our idea of good is to proclaim ourselves that which, in our hearts, we most surely are—judges of men ; and, by implication, if we make the statement publicly and with any hope of gaining others to our view—good judges. Yet it is possible to deplore the motives and admire the acts ; to think a man mistaken and withal a finer

fellow than we who name him so. In such a spirit it is possible to see Blaise Pascal. He was a man of genius, a writer of a most engaging brilliance, who yet allowed himself to sink to a sour and melancholy self-absorption, so that he was wholly engaged with his own destiny. But, though his end was of such a character that the story of it may induce a fine contempt, there is in his life a nobleness wholly courageous and high. Very ardently desiring happiness, yet possessed by the idea that in all things he must seek the truth, he ordered his life in the best fashion that he knew; and though he did not find his goal, and though he admitted that the truth was unknown to him, he was yet assured that he did nothing consciously against it, and hoped in death to come to some better sight and knowledge.

There is a mistake not uncommonly made when the lives of the great dead are discussed, which mistake is also sometimes found in their biographies: it is to suppose them so lost in their greatness that they lose the attribute of common man. Thus the great scientist, before whose researches the world stands in respectful amazement, will by the, probably undesired, aid of newspaper reports

be presented to the public as a being wholly absorbed in the progress of his work, and deaf to the call of life around him. Thus the characters that fill the longest rôles upon the stage of history come down to us as soldiers, statesmen, or as kings, and their humanity, their passions and their weaknesses, their little relaxations and their conduct in their hours of ease, are forgotten, or not heeded, or seen only as aids to the study of their official lives. Napoleon comes before us as a man wholly concerned with the conquest and government of nations, and Cromwell as one to whom the cause of liberty supplied the aim of life. And if we were to suggest that the one experienced moments when the joys of fireside comfort seemed to him better than another crown, and in which he did perhaps alter the course of a campaign, and so of the world's history, to secure his ease at dinner and a quiet evening ; and that the other momentarily set aside the defence of constitutions as less urgent than some personal business, we should not improbably be told that we displayed a lack of insight into character, and were, moreover, making baseless suggestions calculated to harm the memory of men who, though perhaps mistaken in their aims, were

not, however, likely to forget so easily their high ambitions.

And yet, perhaps, in making such suggestions we should be nearer to the reality than in following those erudite persons who obscure the man with his official acts, and who do seemingly forget that because great accomplishment is probably the sign of strong character and much steady application, combined with that quality which is called genius, so much the more he who accomplishes any great work may be considered, in all likelihood, more sensitive and more quick than those about him to seize the worth of any happening, and so more fully living and more susceptible to both life's joys and pains, so taking greater part in both its wisdom and its folly. In the possession of genius a man should not be held to have a shield against the attack of human weaknesses, but rather, being the possessor of a keener and more perceptive vision, he should be deemed beset by snares and pitfalls not reckoned of, and therefore not feared, by lesser men.

And so Pascal, although a distinguished mathematician and an author of very uncommon merit, was not freed from human feebleness, but may

indeed be said to have shared most of the failings of other men, and in proportion to his talents to have been gifted with a fine collection of disabilities. For where others might go without accident he must needs stumble, and was aware of difficulties where to his companions the way seemed smooth. He, making use of a finer and more acute sight, saw a greater complexity in human happenings than was apparent to the most of those who were his friends. Yet, as if determined that this should in no way be to his advantage, he asked to see more than even his clear sight could show him, and when he found himself disappointed, allowed the check to his hopes to turn aside the whole current of his life. He was a man of, surely, irritable and nervous temperament, suffering in his body the effects of his too active mind, and was very conscious of the uncertain quality of human knowledge, and of the dangers which attend any reliance upon a thing so unsubstantial. And being persuaded of this fact and assuring himself that no effort of his could place his reasoning on a less assailable basis, he allowed himself to become disgusted with human life and to profess contempt for human deeds, not being able,

as his fellows of a less intelligence, to ignore the inexplicable, and not having a sufficient courage to see in the impossibility of its solution a strong reason to be content with a less wide ambition, and, since he could not find the explanation of his being and of his destiny, concern himself with the best compromise that he could come to in the matter of his intercourse with others.

This he could not persuade himself to do, being, it is kinder to suppose, disabled by his own ability from taking part in a more healthy and less exacting way of life. Mightily concerned with the settlement of certain questions, he was not wholly occupied with the search for abstract truth, but, we may suppose, often forgetting this high-sounding need, strove very eagerly to secure his personal peace of mind and the quiet enjoyment of his surroundings.

He lived in an age which, by comparison, was more ignorant than that in which we live ; he was surrounded with superstition, and had himself been early acquainted with the peculiar explanations of common events that his contemporaries were not unwilling to supply ; he was unacquainted with any attractive and plausible explanation of the

world's existence other than that offered by the Christian religion ; so that, becoming aware of the small value of human intellect when engaged in an endeavour to solve the problems of this and other worlds, and to find the cause and origin of life, and finding that he could happen upon no explanation of these things which should appear proved and unassailable, he gave up the struggle and turned to accomplish another aim. Being attracted very strongly and very constantly throughout his life by the teaching of Christianity, he made the discovery that though he could not show its teachings true, he could yet proclaim that no man could name and prove them false. And since, upon this showing, he no longer felt convicted of a misplaced trust, he professed himself content with this, saying that the instinct which attracted him to his religion was, and ought to be, a true and faithful guide.

And so, after a troubled voyage, Pascal came to some haven—not, there is reason to suppose, the harbour of his dreams, or one in which the disturbance of bad weather should never meet him, yet at least a sheltered place in which he might ride the last years of his life at anchor, and that without fear that he should break from his moorings.

He had written of the necessity to make a choice, to bet—the expression is his—upon the chance of death or life ; and he had done so. He had made acceptance of a faith, and shared with others, who had known no difficulty or even conscious action at the choice, a religion that he had very dearly and honestly acquired. The last years of his life would show him, though perhaps happy in his hope of the future, no better instructed to enjoy the world. In that last feverish ascetic outburst he marks the trend of all his life ; he was so much concerned with the assurance of his own destiny that when he sought it he was careless of other claims, and when he was convinced that he had found it he became unconscious of all other considerations, wrapping himself in the contemplation of his own life to come. Had he asked less of fortune, he had surely found more happiness ; had he lived more for the moment, he had likely done more good to those about him ; but, making the too exorbitant demand of a clear and understanding sight, and looking always to the future, he failed, it must seem, in his duty as a mortal and grew crippled in his search for immortality.

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